

Sermon – 16/03/2014 pm

Mercy on All

Study Text: Romans 11:28-32

Imagine there was a split in this church. No, I am not suggesting anything but we know these things happen. If the church had no property everyone would go their own way. But where property is involved it is different. Both groups will lay claim to the property on the basis that they are the 'true church'. A church in Scotland calls itself the 'Free Church Continuing' for this very reason. This group claims to be upholding the constitution or articles of the original church – as does the other group. Since it is not possible to literally split an ancient church building in half, the high court was asked to decide which group was being faithful to the constitution of the church.

We could look at God's covenant with his people in a similar way. God made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. Under this covenant he promised to send Messiah who would be 'wounded for our transgressions; would be led as a lamb to the slaughter; and who would bear the sins of many and make intercession for transgressors' (Isaiah 53). God would send his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him will become a child of God and have eternal life.

When we ask who the covenant people of God are, we should ask who are the fulfilment of his promises and who are worshipping him according to his covenant. Who are the true seed of Abraham? (4:16, Galatians 3:14). Is it the ethnic Jews who rejected Jesus, or is it the church with Christ as the head? In Galatians 3:16 Paul writes, '*and to your seed, who is Christ*'.

Or are there two covenants in operation – one for the Jews and one for the rest? This is what some think. As I continue my reading on this subject I came across the term, 'two-covenant theology'. The writer denied the truth of such a theology because it says that God will save all the Jews outside the covenant of grace. Is this not a consequence of saying that Paul teaches the restoration of 'all Israel' as ethnic Israel in the end? There are many pitfalls in interpreting Romans 11:26 in this way; two-covenant theology is yet another.

In Galatians Paul writes, 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation ... peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God' (Galatians 6:15-16).

1. Gospel Enemies

In verses 28-32 Paul gives a concluding summary of his argument in chapter 11, particularly from verse 11. Verse 28 begins without a conjunction: 'Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake'. It refers back to the stumbling, the casting away, and the breaking off of Israel (11:11, 15, 17) with reference to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We stress this point because Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a man of conjunctions, fails to note this disjunction. The word 'they', added to this verse for understanding, refers to ethnic Israel from the olive tree analogy, but he cannot thereby claim that the Israel in verse 26 must therefore be ethnic Israel – a bit farfetched we might say.

We also keep in mind, as Leon Morris says, that Paul has not departed from his teaching in earlier chapters that justification is by grace through faith to all who believe. 'The gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, the Jew first and also the Greek' (1:16). The gospel came to the Jew first but most rejected it. Did this mean God's promise had failed? Certainly not! (3:3, 9:6). 'For they are not all Israel who are of Israel'. There is a true Israel or election Israel within ethnic Israel. God's purpose is always fulfilled by divine election – 'not of works but of Him who calls' (9:11).

Paul moves on to show that Gentiles are among those whom God has called, just as the prophets said (9:24). Still it is necessary for people to hear the gospel; God is sovereign in this also. He sends preachers that people will hear and believe. The Jews have heard (10:18) but they stubbornly rejected the gospel. They were 'stiff necked' as Steven said (Acts 7:51), and as Paul soon experienced. But just as God was longsuffering with these contrary people of old, so he continues to deal with them (10:21). He has not cast them off for good – actually he has cast them off for 'good' – for the good of the Gentiles.

The wonderful thing that God is doing, and what can rightly be called a mystery, is just this, that the casting away of the Jews has resulted in the gospel going to the Gentiles. This is seen in Paul's amazing ministry. This in turn is bringing about a jealousy among the Jews. Paul rejoices in this amazing and wonderful plan of God to save Jew and Gentile – and all within his election plan and purpose. He has, 'Made known the mystery of his will ... to gather together in one all things in Christ' (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The Jews are enemies by divine purpose, and by obstinate refusal to believe. They are enemies for the sake of the Gentiles – Paul is writing to Gentiles in the church. Their opposition to the gospel, in the sovereign purposes of God, led to the gospel being preached to the Gentiles. The Gentiles should remember this and be extremely humble and grateful (*cf.* 11:20).

But this does not mean God no longer loves them, the Jews. 'Israel are both enemies and 'beloved at the same time' (John Murray). 'Concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers' (11:28). Paul neither says nor means they will all be saved in the end. He says they are loved; loved by God for the sake of the fathers. God's purpose in election stands. He has mercy on who he wills (9:18). His purposes are not thwarted by the actions of men. Just because they are enemies of the gospel does not mean God cannot love them. Election is not based on works or our response to the gospel. It is determined in the secret counsels of God.

Reference to the fathers takes us back to chapter 9; 'Of whom are the fathers' (9:5). God loved Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (9:13). He set his love upon them. Though their descendants turned away to worship other gods, He persisted with them. Because he loved them God punished them in different ways, including the exile. He always kept a remnant according to the election of grace (11:5).

Though they are enemies God loves them, and has not cast them away totally or permanently. But this not mean all ethnic Jews will be saved in the end, unless you read this into the verse. Leon Morris warns, 'We should not understand this (verse) in the sense of the rabbinic doctrine of the merits of the fathers that won all sorts of benefits for their descendants'.

2. Gifts and Calling

The unbelief of the Jews was astounding, given all the advantages and privileges they had. Back in chapter 3 Paul referred to them being given the Scriptures, the very oracles of God. In chapter 9 he expresses his great sorrow that they had become enemies of God when they had so many privileges; including the fathers and above all having God's only begotten Son born in their race (9:5).

So many advantages. So many gifts from God. These gifts remain in place. They are irrevocable (11:29). No one can change the fact that Jesus was born a Jew. God has not changed his mind regarding these gifts. He has no regrets because all has been done according to his eternal purposes in election and justification by grace, not race. Paul was not in the business of making excuses for God and nor are we. We do not say God must save all the Jews in order to keep his covenant promises.

What is the calling of God? Is it effectual calling? James M. Boice says 'No', although Martin Lloyd-Jones says 'yes'. This calling refers to God's calling people unto himself under the old covenant. It is tied in with giving them gifts. God called Abraham to leave his country and go to a land he would show him. He called Moses to go to Egypt. God called them his people, his special people, and this calling remains.

But it is not effectual calling and does not mean all ethnic Israel will be saved. When Paul spoke of the great advantages given his countrymen 'according to the flesh', he did so with great sorrow; which is hard to understand if he knew they would all be saved in the end.

One of the gifts God promised Abraham was land – although Paul does not mention this in 9:4-5. Abraham never possessed the land of Canaan but his flesh descendants did. Maurice Roberts, in a paper given to me, expounds Romans 11 in the popular way and points to Hosea 3:4-5 as referring to ethnic Israel being preserved, even though Paul does not refer to this verse. Roberts goes on to observe the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and 'that the state of Israel began again in 1948'. This return to Palestine is important to him and many others. Roberts quotes with approval a man who applauds the Israeli army reuniting the old city as the six day war ended and Israel occupying most of the places Joshua conquered 3500 years before! This supposedly marks the end of the time of the Gentiles. This is Zionism.

Martin Lloyd-Jones flatly denies any reference to land here in Romans and condemns the interpretation given in the Schofield Bible. Even so, his interpretation leaves others to 'fill in the gaps' as it were – men like Roberts and others. If we understand Romans 11 as referring to a sudden influx of ethnic Jews after the Gentiles have been converted people see this as an influx into Palestine. They forget that Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight' (John 18:36). Should Christians be taking up arms with the Israelis?

3. God Might Have Mercy on All

We return to spiritual matters; as Roberts does after saying 'the Jews have returned to the land of their fathers ... first the physical return, the natural restoration and then the full spiritual recovery'. What an amazing thing to say. Paul says nothing of a physical return. His focus is totally spiritual.

Paul continues with his summary of the great paradox, the great mystery which is God's plan to save Jew and Gentile. You will know this plan quite well by now: briefly, God has cast way

the Jews that the gospel might go to the Gentiles, thereby making the Jews jealous. God wonderfully grafted wild olives into the tree and is able to graft broken-off branches back in to make one tree for his glory.

Here in verse 30 he says that the Gentiles were once disobedient to God but through the disobedience or unbelief of the Jews the gospel, accompanied by God's mercy and saving grace, has come to the Gentiles. This being so, this outpouring of divine mercy upon a disobedient people can also happen to disobedient Jews (11:31).

Leon Morris writes, 'clearly Paul saw justification as working out for both groups in such a manner that each in some way assisted the other. This is the consistent divine purpose'. Many translations have at the end of verse 31, 'they also may **now** obtain mercy', because many manuscripts have this. It makes little difference because we hope no one says that God's mercy towards the Jews must await some future age.

In some ways Paul is going back to what he wrote in chapter 1-3. There he showed that the Gentiles were given up by God to vile passions (1:26). The Jews were boasting in the law which they failed to obey. His conclusion is that both Jews and Gentiles are alike under sin (3:9). Here in 11:32 he concludes, 'for God has committed them all to disobedience'. Literally he has shut them all up in disobedience.

They are like prisoners, unable to save themselves. The 'all' here refers to both groups, Jews and Gentiles. There is no difference (3:32). It is essential that both Jew and Gentile understand that salvation is by grace and not race. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

Paul's conclusion is that 'He (God) might have mercy on all' (11:32). This does not mean all will be saved in the end, of either Jews or Gentiles. It means that no one will be saved apart from the mercy of God. If there is any element of merit or works then grace is no longer grace (11:6). If there is any element of race or family connection it is no longer grace.

May the Lord help us to understand this great truth of the unique gospel that we have heard and that we proclaim? 'There is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (3:23-24).

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