

11. The Elect (4Q 2017—Salvation by Faith Alone—Book of Romans)

Biblical material: *Romans 10, 11.*

Quotes

- All grace comes from the God of grace. *William Gurnall*
- Grace is the freeness of love. *Thomas Goodwin*
- The essence of the doctrine of grace is that God is *for us*. *T.H.L. Parker*
- Unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all. *Charles Hodge*
- Grace isn't a little prayer you chant before receiving a meal. It's a way to live. *Jackie Windspear*
- Grace is given to heal the spiritually sick, not to decorate spiritual heroes. *Martin Luther*
- I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. *Anne Lamott*

Questions

What does “the election of grace” mean? If some are predestined to be saved, where's the grace? How do we understand grace to operate, and is it “cheap grace”? What is the difference between the thinking of Jews and foreigners explained here? How does God look? Most of all, how does this discussion illustrate the great controversy?

Bible discussion

These two chapters concentrate on the fundamental way in which everyone is made right with God. As is made clear—there's no difference between Jew and Gentile (foreigner) for they have the same God and are saved the same way (10:12, 13). While Jews might have had an earlier “advantage,” Paul now argues that foreigners have the “advantage” (11:13-24; 28-32). The plan is that “all Israel” will be saved (11:26). This is not universal salvation, but that all who choose to become part of a true Israel that turns to God to be made right will indeed be saved.

Paul want to make it clear that though Israel as a nation failed along with their misguided religious system, individual Jews are still part of God's chosen people (10:1-4). It's just that all need to understand that being made right with God doesn't come from legalistic observance, but by God's grace (11:5, 6). Israel didn't get what they were looking for, because they were going about it the wrong way. As a result God allowed them to go their own way, which lead to an “unthinking attitude” (the Greek word means to be stupefied, to go into a torpor: maybe we could say “catatonic”!). As a result they were blind and deaf to God (11:7-10). They didn't hear his appeals, and acted as if God had not spoken and his prophets had not said a word (10:16-21).

But that's not to say they thought they were rejected - that all was lost (11:1, 11, 12). There is still the opportunity for everyone, Jew or foreigner. In an extended metaphor, Paul speaks of branches being grafted in to olive tree stock. The foreigners are from a wild olive, and have been grafted in. How much easier to graft back in the original branches, he says. So there should be no boasting (11:13-24). The “election” is based on the goodness of God, his gracious way in which he makes us right with him.

Paul can't help expressing his delight as he considers the kind of person this gracious God really is: "Oh how deep and rich is God's wisdom and knowledge! How incredible his decisions, how unimaginable his methods! Who can know God's thoughts? Who can give him advice? Who has given God anything first, and then needed to be repaid? Everything comes from him, and exists through him, and is for him. Glory to him forever, Amen!" (11:33-36 FBV).

Comment

Some are concerned by the terms "election" and "chosen" in this passage, as if God has predetermined those whom he will save. This is not the case—these terms are primarily demonstrating God's foreknowledge of the choices we will make, and that he is the one who saves. Paul is contrasting the means by which the Jewish religious leaders thought salvation could be achieved (by the specific observance of legal requirements) with the graciousness of God. It is the sovereignty and power of God that is being contrasted with flawed human thinking, not predestination contrasted with free choice.

The primary theme is that we are saved by trusting in God's graciousness. That means knowing God as he has revealed himself to us in Jesus—the one who is grace personified. Not only knowing, but responding in total trust and confidence, sure that God will indeed remake us in his image, recreate us to be once more like him in our thoughts and actions.

Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor," and indeed it is. But this sounds rather mechanistic. Grace must never be separated from the one who not only gives grace but *is* grace. We can truly trust a gracious God who always acts toward us in our best interest, whose grace is always amazing and transforming!

Ellen White Comments

God has enjoined the duty upon His human agents to communicate the character of God, testifying to His grace, His wisdom, and His benevolence, by manifesting His refined, tender, merciful love. . . . {AG 229}

Jesus came into the world to illustrate the character of God in His own life, and He swept back the misrepresentations that Satan had originated, and revealed the glory of God. It was only by living among men that He could reveal the mercy, compassion, and love of His heavenly Father; for it was only by actions of benevolence that He could set forth the grace of God. The unbelief of men was deep seated, and yet they could not resist the testimony of His God-like example, and His deeds of love and truth. {SD 139}

Christ came to this world, and clothed his divinity with humanity, taking upon Him the nature of man. He came to pass through the experiences of humanity, to pass over the ground on which Adam had fallen, to redeem his failure, to meet and conquer the adversary of God and man, that through his grace man might be an overcomer, and finally have a place with Him upon his throne... Satan misrepresented the character of God, and man, who had been made in the divine image, doubted his Heavenly Father's love, distrusted his word, and set himself in stubborn unbelief and rebellion against his requirements. {BEcho, November 1, 1892}

We must present to the people, not the imaginations of men, not their schemes and conclusions but the grace of God in the gift of his only begotten Son... {GCB, October 1, 1896}

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