

(Romans) Romans 11:1-36

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon on Romans 11 emphasizes God's sovereignty, the importance of grace over works, and the necessity of humility in faith.

Duration: 45:57

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Humility Before God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the concept of God's mercy and grace as seen in Romans 3. The speaker emphasizes that it is God who opens our eyes to see what Jesus did for us on the cross and allows us to hear the Holy Spirit. The speaker also quotes David in verse 9, warning against being trapped by blessings and thinking all is well with God. The sermon highlights the balance between God's kindness and severity, urging listeners to not focus solely on one aspect of God's nature. The speaker warns against being conceited and emphasizes the importance of humility.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Romans chapter 11. I mentioned in a study some weeks ago, that Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11 could be considered as, within parentheses or brackets, between chapters 8 and chapter 12, dealing with the history of Israel, but using that history to illustrate three important characteristics of God. One, is His sovereignty over all humanity.

Second, His righteousness and the way by which He grants righteousness to people. And the third, here in chapter 11, deals with God's faithfulness. Does God give up on people who have turned their backs to Him? That's the question.

And He says in verse 1, I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be. For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. The sovereignty of God and His control over all people does not cancel out the fact that God gives man a free will.

And as I said in our study of Romans chapter 9, we can't often reconcile these two truths. But they are still true. That God is sovereign over all men.

And at the same time, He has given man a free will. So, God will not force a man to receive what He offers. Man has to make a free choice.

But God has a remnant in every generation that is going to be a witness for Him. And that's what Paul is speaking about here in Romans 11. God has not rejected His people.

Verse 2, Whom He foreknew. And he quotes a number of Old Testament examples and verses. He says how Elijah pleaded with God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed Thy prophets, they have torn down Thine altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking My life.

But what does God say to him? He says, I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. In Elijah's time, he thought that everybody was a Baal worshipper. Because Ahab's rule was so dictatorial and autocratic that Elijah couldn't imagine that anybody was not an idolater.

But God who watched and looked over all of Israel at that time, noticed that there were seven thousand people across Israel who had been faithful during those three and a half years of famine and who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And Paul uses that example and says, in the same way today, at this present time, there is a remnant according to God's gracious choice. The vast majority may be worshipping idols or turning away from God, but there is a remnant.

The Jewish people, Israel as a nation, was in a backslidden condition. They had turned away from God and for nearly four hundred years before Christ came, there were no prophets, which is an indication of God having given up on them. But yet, there was a remnant.

Even when Jesus came, there was the Simeon and the Anna and the twelve disciples and people like that and even the three wise men from far away. God always has here and there in a nook or a corner those who respond to Him. And even though we may not know where they are, they are there.

And that's what Paul is trying to say. It's the same today, two thousand years after Paul wrote it. It's the same today as it was in his time.

But he mentions the fact that this is a result of God's gracious choice. Verse 6, If it is by grace, then it is no longer on the basis of works. You know, this is one of the great themes of Romans that it's got nothing to do with works.

Salvation is not by works is one of the main themes of this letter. And this letter, which explains the Gospel more clearly than anything else, emphasizes the fact that salvation is not by works. Grace and works don't go together.

It says here in verse 6, If it is by grace, it cannot be on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace. We need to understand that.

That if salvation is by grace, it cannot be on the basis of any other works. Now, the reason why many Christian groups become very exclusive is because they have not understood this truth. Now, if we say that God accepts a man only after he is born again and baptized, then, of course, we've added something more that the man has to do before God accepts him.

And though it may look innocent, and it's a scriptural command to be baptized, yet it cancels out grace. Because if it is on the basis of grace, it says here in this verse, then grace is no longer grace. And we find among Christian groups today there are so many different, sometimes unwritten, rules and regulations that different churches have on the basis of which they will accept a person into membership or into fellowship.

Some demand that women should remove all their ornaments. Now, even if they find it in scripture, you cannot make that as a basis for salvation. Salvation is by grace without any other works.

There is a place for works, and that is after we are saved to prove our love for God by obedience to His commandments. But there is absolutely no place for grace in salvation. We need to see this clearly.

The moment you bring works in, you're canceling out grace. Then you're saying salvation is by works. You cannot have both.

It's not grace per plus works, neither is it works. It's either grace alone or it's by works. And when people move away from this foundation, they move into exclusivism, cultism, and all types of dangerous doctrines.

So this is a very important verse for us to understand. That grace and works are contrary to each other if we look for that as a foundation for our salvation. But as I said, grace leads us, gives us power to obey God in works that please Him after we are saved, certainly.

Just as there is no place for works for the forgiveness of sins, there is plenty of place for works after our sins are forgiven. He just mentions that in passing and moves on to his theme, which is, what then? Verse 7 That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained. You see, he takes this example of Israel who did more works than perhaps any of us have ever done in our lifetime.

They kept so many commandments, they obeyed so many of those Old Testament laws, and Leviticus has got a whole lot of them. And they are very careful to keep all those laws. And one would think that God would have been mightily pleased to have a group of people who are so careful to obey every little thing that He said in the book of Leviticus and Exodus and Deuteronomy.

And yet, He wasn't. Because the law was not given for the purpose of saving people. It was only to show people that you couldn't be saved.

It's like a mirror. A mirror cannot clean my face. But a mirror can show me how dirty my face is.

And a mirror is very useful. We look at a mirror every day. But none of us ever try to clean our face with a mirror.

The law is like that. It shows us our sinful fallen condition. But it cannot help us to be cleansed.

So Israel tried to be cleansed through the law and to find eternal life through the law and did not obtain it. But we read here in verse 7 that those who were chosen obtained it. The chosen ones are the ones whom God chose from before the foundation of the world to be His people.

That's among Jews and Gentiles from all nations. Those who were chosen by God obtained the salvation and the rest were hardened. So, as it says in scripture, he quotes the scripture here again in verse 8. This is what the scriptures refer to when they say God gave them a spirit of stupor or God has put them to sleep shutting their eyes and their ears so they don't understand what we're talking about when we tell them of Christ.

They don't understand. You see, we don't realize sufficiently that God was the one who opened our eyes and our ears to hear the message of the gospel. So often we take credit for it ourselves as though we were holy enough to respond to God and others were not.

It's grace all the way through, my friend. It's got nothing to do with your goodness or your being holy or your understanding or even your seeking after God. Remember when we studied Romans 3, it says there's no one who seeks after God.

The whole thing from start to finish is God's mercy and His grace. And it's God who allowed our eyes to be open to see what Jesus did for us on the cross and our ears to be open to hear what the Holy Spirit is speaking. David is also quoted here in verse 9 as saying this, Let their good food and other blessings trap them into thinking all is well between themselves and God.

This is a living Bible paraphrase. And let these good things boomerang on them and fall back upon their heads to justly crush them. Let their eyes be dim so that they cannot see and let them walk bent back forever with a heavy load.

David was referring to his enemies who were oppressing him in the Psalms there. But the Apostle Paul quotes it here in relation to those who have rejected Christ. That their table becomes a snare for them.

That means the fact that they experience material blessings deceives them into thinking that everything is all right between them and God. It's a trap and a snare and they stumble on it. God blesses all people in the world materially.

But the greatest blessing of God is this, that He opens our eyes and yours to hear His voice and to see the way of salvation through Christ. Let's turn now to Romans and chapter 11 and verse 11. I mentioned in our last study that this chapter deals with God's faithfulness just like chapter 9 deals with God's sovereignty.

Chapter 10 with God's righteousness. This deals with God's faithfulness and He's speaking particularly of His faithfulness to the seed of Abraham to the nation of Israel with the seed of Abraham with whom God made a covenant through their father Abraham. So He's talking about the Israelites, the Jews, who have not responded to the gospel and have turned away, rejected Christ and subsequently in all these 30 years very few of them were saved when actually all of them should have responded to the message of the Messiah.

I say then, verse 11, Paul says, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by that transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them jealous. This is very interesting. It says here that God's purpose was to make salvation available to us non-Jews so that the Jews would become jealous and see what God does for us and thus want it ourselves.

This is amazing that the Holy Spirit would put something like this in Scripture. But it's interesting that God provokes people to desire something which they don't have by blessing someone else with that very thing. It can even happen among believers.

A child of God, a born again child of God can sometimes turn away from some truth in Scripture because he sees that truth being carried to an extreme, to a fanatical extreme by certain groups. And the end result is that he misses out on the blessing God has for him through that particular truth. And so when God wants to challenge that person He can show that person someone else who has received that truth and whose life is tremendously blessed by God and provoke him to seek that good thing himself.

Salvation is a very good thing. And the Jews rejected it. They didn't want it.

They didn't believe that Christ was the Messiah. But when other people responded to it and received Christ and their lives were transformed, this provoked some of the Jews to seek for it themselves. One of the classic cases is Paul himself who wrote this letter.

He rejected the entire Christian message as heresy and considered Jesus of Nazareth a heretic. But one day when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being stoned to death, Paul was watching the whole thing and he could not escape the conviction in his conscience that what Stephen had was of God. He could not escape that conviction.

And finally, he responded. In the same way, God may speak to you. You got a prejudice against something.

And God may show you one day through the life of another that that very thing you are prejudiced against is of God because of the blessing, because of the Christ likeness it produces. I don't mean statistics or results because cults and false religions have statistics to prove anything. I'm talking about Christ likeness.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit for example. Many people are turned away from the doctrine of the fullness of the Spirit because of the fanatical extremes that some people have gone to who claim to have it. And the counterfeits, the abundance of counterfeits in this area.

But yet, there is the genuine. That which the apostles experienced in the day of Pentecost. And if you are prejudiced against it, you can miss out on what God has for you.

God wants to provoke you to seek for that good thing which He offers to all His children by showing you what He can do in the life of another who is filled with the Spirit. It's the same thing here. God seeks to make the Jews jealous by showing what the Gentiles have experienced through this salvation.

And then Paul goes on to say in verse 12, if their transgression be riches for the world, their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be? In other words, if the whole world became rich as a result of God's offer of salvation and the Jews stumbled over it and turned it down, think what a greater blessing the world is going to share when the Jews come to Christ. He says, if when the Jews stumbled there was so much blessing on the world that all of us can hear about the message of salvation, can you imagine what blessing there will be when the Jews turn to Christ? And he says here, as you know, I'm speaking to you who are Gentiles. I'm an apostle of the Gentiles and I magnify my ministry.

I remind the Jews about my ministry and if somehow I might move them to jealousy and save some of them. In other words, I'm seeking to make these Israeli people want what the rest of the world has got in Christ. And further, he repeats the same argument again, verse 15, if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? This is logic he uses here, spirit influence logic.

If the Jews were rejected and that resulted in the reconciliation of the whole world, in other words, the offer of salvation to the whole world, can you imagine what's going to happen when they are accepted? It'll be like dead people coming back to life. And then verse 16, if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also and if the root be holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off and you being a wild olive were grafted in among them, he uses a picture here of a tree.

And he says if the root is holy, then the branches are holy too. Holy in the sense of being set apart. Not holy in the sense of partaking of divine nature, but holiness means being set apart.

The person Abraham, the man Abraham was set apart by God in Ur of the Chaldees. And therefore his children have also been set apart by God as a special people. Through whom God fulfilled his purposes before the coming of Christ.

And then he refers to us who are non-Jews. He says some of the branches were broken off. Those are the Jewish people who rejected the Messiah, who didn't want what Jesus came to offer.

And you, that is all of us Gentiles, who were wild olives, we had no connection with God at all. We were grafted in, we were cut out from that old tree and grafted in. And we have become partaker of the rich root of this olive tree.

We have benefited from the Old Testament Scriptures which were given to the Jews. From the Old Testament Jewish people who finally became the apostles of Jesus Christ and who wrote the New Testament, most of it. So we have received a lot from the Jewish people.

He says, now don't be arrogant, don't look down on them. Because if you are arrogant remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. We are not to boast as though, well, I am such a great person and that is why God replaced those other branches.

Remember, he says, that your importance comes from the fact that you are a branch in God's tree. Jesus said, I am the vine and you are the branches. We must never forget that that we are supported by the root.

Well, you may say, those branches were broken off, verse 19, to make room for me. So, we can imagine that we are pretty good. That's true.

But, he says, be careful. Because the same thing that happened, this is an important verse, verse 20, the same thing that happened to those branches can happen to you. See, it is very easy for us when we think of these great truths like the sovereign choice of God, God choosing us before the foundation of the world, etc., for us to begin to relax and say, well, then it doesn't matter how we live, you know, because God has chosen us.

But what does God's word say? Those Jews were broken off for their unbelief. And you stand by your faith. So, don't be conceited but fear.

To whom is this word written? It's not written to unbelievers. It's written to born-again believers. Don't be conceited but fear.

Be humble and grateful and careful. Because, you see here, if God did not spare the branches which were there in the tree in the first place, as the Jewish people, He won't spare you either. If He could cut them off, He can cut you off.

And that's why Paul himself, in one place, in the last verse of 1 Corinthians 9, he says, I keep my body under subjection, he says, lest, after having preached to other people, I myself should be disqualified or rejected or cast away. Paul lived in that fear. Not a morbid fear or something that brought insecurity into his life or in his relationship with God.

No. God doesn't want us ever to have that morbid fear. But a healthy fear.

See, it's something like, if you're walking through a minefield, you'd be very careful where you put your foot down. Or if you're walking through a forest full of poisonous snakes, you'd be very careful. That's a healthy

fear.

We need to go through it. And that's what the Bible is speaking of here. The danger is of pride.

See, the way people fall into sin and fall away from God is by pride. That's what's mentioned here in verse 20. Do not be conceited.

That's the point. Don't be conceited but fear. See, it's when there is conceit and say, well, God's accepted me and I'm okay, that we tend to relax.

If we are humble, we will also be careful saying it's only God's grace that brought me so far. I want to trust God's grace to preserve me. And I want to live in fear.

I want to live in faith. That is the attitude God wants each of us to have. We turn today to Romans chapter 11 and verse 22.

In our last study, we were considering how Paul describes the way God chose the Gentiles and rejected the Jews because they rejected him. God doesn't reject anyone. Jesus said, him that cometh to me, I will never cast out.

It's people who reject God and then God rejects them. So, when people reject God, they are cut off. It's their own choice.

The Jews refused Christ. They refused the salvation the apostles presented to them and they were cut off. And those who accepted the message, the Gentiles, the non-Jews, were grafted into this tree.

But he says, be careful. Don't be conceited. But fear because the way those Jews were rejected can happen to you as well.

In the previous verses, he says in verse 21, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. And that's a warning for all of us, particularly when we look at Christian history in the last 2,000 years. We find many groups that God raised up very often through one godly man.

Just like he raised up the Jews through Abraham. There are many movements that have come up in Christendom through the years, through one godly man. But, as the years have gone by, they've lost out spiritually.

They become conceited, thinking that we are accepted. We will never be rejected. And to such people, God says, don't be conceited, verse 20.

But fear. Because if God did not spare the Jews, and today we could say up to 2,000 years, if God did not spare this group, and that group, and this denomination, and that denomination, and this other one, all of which started out in a very godly way with godly men as their founders, and yet where are they today? Far away from even the truth of Scripture. That's a warning to all of us.

A warning to be humble. So he says, look carefully, verse 22. When it says, behold, look carefully at the kindness and the severity of God.

God is both kind and severe. And we can say that when you look at only one side of God's nature, you can get a wrong doctrine from there. There are people who look at God's kindness and who even go to the

extent of saying that everybody in the world will be saved, because God is kind and He's good, and He's never going to allow anybody to be tortured in hell forever and ever.

They use human logic instead of believing the truth of Scripture and what Jesus said. Then there are others who look at the other side of God, which is His severity, and keep on preaching warnings and threatenings and keep people in their churches in perpetual condemnation. What is the answer? The answer is here in this verse, verse 22.

Behold then the kindness and severity of God. Look carefully at both His kindness and His severity. The Bible says in John 1, verse 14, that the glory of God was seen in Jesus Christ full of two things, grace and truth.

Don't look so much at grace that you forget truth. Don't look so much at truth that you forget grace. Because there was a balance in the glory of God seen in Jesus Christ.

He put His arms around lepers, forgave the thief on the cross, delivered a woman caught in adultery from being stoned. At the same time, He called the Pharisees a generation of vipers and took a whip and chased people out of the temple who were making money in the name of religion. Behold grace and truth.

Behold the kindness and the severity of God manifested when the Word became flesh. And the Christian church also, if it is to reflect the nature of Christ, what must it do? It must put its arms around the lepers, be compassionate to those who have fallen into adultery, who repent, and to last minute deathbed repentances of decoits and thieves who want to turn to the Lord, like the thief on the cross. At the same time, it needs to whip out of God's house those who make money in the name of religion and expose hypocrisy and unreality and sham and self-righteousness in today's Pharisees.

That is the total message. If you take only one side of it and not the other, whichever side it is, you're going to be imbalanced and it's going to be a caricature of the true God. And unfortunately, in a lot of Christendom today, it's this caricature of God that is being presented.

So, this is a very important verse. Look carefully. Meditate on.

Observe the kindness of God and the severity of God. And if you want to be balanced in your own Christian life, look carefully at these two aspects of God's nature. They are not mutually contradictory.

It's not that He's kind sometimes and severe sometimes. No. God doesn't change.

He's always kind. He's always severe. In His severity, there is a kindness.

And in His kindness, there is a severity. Once we understand that, we see that these are not two optional things. We're not to be either kind or severe.

It's like a father towards his children. What should a father be towards his children? Both kind and strict. Not either one.

He must always be kind and always be strict. There are certain things children must not be allowed to do, or read, or watch on television, etc. There must be a strictness in a home if you want children to be protected from evil.

At the same time, there must be kindness. It mustn't be a regimented army atmosphere at home where everything is according to rules and regulations and no kindness. A father must be like God.

A mother must be like God. Kind and strict. All the time.

Not sometimes kind and sometimes strict, but always kind and always strict. And notice here, it says in verse 22, to those who fell, God showed severity. But to you, God's kindness.

If, and there's a big if, if you continue in his kindness, you know, people can take advantage of God's kindness and discover that God is also severe. And if you don't continue in his kindness, what does the word of God say to believers? If you don't continue in his kindness, you also will be cut off. You say, that's impossible.

That's exactly what the Jews said. But they were cut off. That's exactly what a lot of Christian groups have said through the years.

We'll never be cut off. But they were cut off. And it says here, you also will be cut off.

And in the same way, those people who have been cut off, like the Jews, they can be grafted in again. If they don't continue in their unbelief. See, there are two things here.

One is pride in verse 20, and the other is unbelief in verse 23. These two go together. People are rejected by God because of pride and unbelief.

And they can come back to God in humility and faith. Humility and faith are the opposites. And if you want to be accepted by God, the two things we need most are humility and faith.

Don't be conceited, verse 20, and don't continue in unbelief, verse 23. Put your trust in God and humble yourself. God is able to graft them in again.

It is God who determines. If they don't continue in unbelief, but trust Him, God will put them in. God doesn't put people in arbitrarily.

Neither does He cut off people arbitrarily. It says here very clearly, God cuts off people when they are conceited. Or, verse 22, when they don't continue in His kindness.

And God grafts people in, not arbitrarily, but because they don't continue in their unbelief, but come to faith, verse 23. And He says this, If God was willing to take you, verse 24, who were so far away from Him, a wild olive tree, and graft you into His own good olive tree, which is a very, very unusual thing to do, don't you think, as it says in the Living Bible, that He will be far more ready to put the Jews back again, who were there in the first place. So, what is the theme of Romans 11? God's faithfulness to the people He has chosen.

But that doesn't negate or cancel out the necessity of humility and faith on the part of those He has chosen. That's also important. Then He goes on to say in verse 25, I don't want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery.

I want you to know this truth, so that you don't become proud. Once again, He's talking about pride and arrogance. Lest you become wise in your own estimation.

What a tremendous danger there is of God's people, because they've been blessed, becoming wise in their own estimation. This is a tragedy that has befallen so many, many groups of reformation that have come in the history of Christendom. Reformers start a group to bring people back to the New Testament standards and teaching.

And after a period of time, this group that started off in humility and brokenness, have become wise in their own estimation, proud. And they're cut off. He says, I want you to remember it was a hardening that has come upon the Gentiles, upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and ultimately all Israel will be saved.

It's true, the Jews have set themselves against the Gospel. But this will last only until the Gentiles have come to Christ. And then, all Israel will be saved.

So it's good for us to recognize that God's mercy is so large. And we were not chosen because of any goodness in us. It was God's grace and His mercy.

If you remember that till the end of your life, you'll be perfectly safe. Let's turn today to Romans chapter 11 and verse 25. In our last three studies in Romans 11, we've been looking at God's faithfulness to His people Israel.

But a faithfulness that is conditional on Israel's humility and faith. The two things that we are warned about in this chapter are pride and unbelief. In verse 20 and 23.

And now He goes on to say to help the Gentiles, that includes all of us, to be humble. I don't want you brethren to be uninformed of this mystery. Lest you be wise in your own estimation.

He speaks here again about the danger of pride. Because God rejected somebody else and He's chosen me. It's a partial hardening, a temporary hardening that's come upon Israel.

And it's only until all those Gentiles who were chosen by God from before the foundation of the world have come to Christ. And once that happens, once the last person whose name is in the book of life has been saved somewhere in the world, then all Israel will be saved. Now when it says all Israel will be saved, He's not talking about every person who calls himself Israel.

We must not forget what Paul himself says in the last part of Romans and chapter 2, where he says that not everyone who calls himself a Jew is a Jew. Romans 2, 28 and 29 he says he's not a Jew who's one outwardly, but he's a Jew who's one inwardly. And so there are in Israel a remnant who will be saved.

And that's the all Israel that will be saved mentioned here. And again he quotes this Old Testament verse which says the deliverer will come from Zion and he'll remove ungodliness from Jacob and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. So he's speaking here about God's faithfulness to the Jewish people and we see that even today in the restoration of those people to the land that he'd given to Abraham many hundreds of years ago.

From the standpoint of the gospel it says in verse 28 they are enemies for your sake. But from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. As far as the gospel is concerned the Jews are enemies of the gospel of Christ.

They are enemies of Jesus Christ himself. When we look at it from that standpoint they are enemies of the gospel. But when you look at it from the standpoint of God's choice the fact that he chose Abraham and gave promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob then they are still beloved of God for the sake of their fathers.

And he goes on to say weren't you also disobedient verse 30 once upon a time and yet God showed his mercy upon you because these others were disobedient God rejected them and chose you now these also now have become disobedient just like you were formerly. In order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. So God is ultimately merciful.

He longs to be merciful to people and not to punish them. We must remember that. This is one important difference between man's nature and God's nature.

Man longs to punish people. God longs to forgive them. And man will punish even for a small mistake or slip up.

God is long suffering. And the more we partake of God's nature the more we will be long suffering with inefficient foolish and stupid people around us. God wants to show mercy to the Jews just as he has shown mercy to you.

And ultimately he says in verse 32. Whether it's Jew or Gentiles. God has shut them all up in disobedience so that he can show mercy on all of them.

It's like two students who have failed in an examination. If pass marks are 40% the one who got 35% has failed and the one who's got 5% has also failed. And it doesn't really matter whether one got 35% or another person got 5%.

They're both sitting in the same class next year because they failed. But the teacher can be kind and merciful and when he sees that these students are sorry for the way they were lazy and careless and want to take it more seriously, he can give grace marks to both of them so that both of them pass. The one who gets 5% who got 5% and the one who got 35%.

Both get the necessary grace marks to be promoted to the next class. This is what verse 32 really refers. He says as far as the human race is concerned, Romans 3.23 is clear.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Some to a greater extent, some to a lesser extent. But all have come short.

Everybody's failed. We compare ourselves with each other and think we're better than one another but as far as God's concerned, we've all failed. So what does God do? He says, okay, you're all in the same category.

The self-righteous Pharisee is in the same category as the thief and the drunkard and the gambler and the adulteress. And everybody's in disobedience so that God can have mercy on all of them. He wants to have mercy on the self-righteous Pharisee and on the thief and the adulteress equally.

Our problem is when we're not willing to accept our position along with these other categories of people whom we despise. And the reason why many people do not have a solid foundation for their Christian life is they have never once in their life acknowledged that they are no better in God's eyes than the worst

sinner in the world. Paul's ministry in life was such a tremendous success because he recognized that he was the chief of sinners.

And any man who walks close to God and lives close to God will always at some time in his life in any way recognize that he is the chief of sinners. That really there couldn't be anybody worse than him on the earth. And yet God forgave him.

If that consciousness has not come even once to you, I have to say I would seriously question how strong the foundation of your salvation is. And probably that's the reason why your experience of Christ is so shallow. Because you've never seen yourself as a good-for-nothing sinner no better than anybody else.

You probably think you were better and that deprives you of the tremendous privilege that you can have of growth into Christ-likeness. God has shut up everybody in disobedience. You are no better than anybody else.

So that he might have mercy on everybody equally. That's God's way. He doesn't pick on someone better than the other or any such thing.

And when Paul thinks about all this, he says Oh the depth! The riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. What a wonderful God we have. How great are his wisdom and knowledge and riches.

How impossible for us to understand his decisions and his methods. That's the Living Bible paraphrase of verse 33. How impossible it is for us to understand God's decisions and God's methods.

There's a verse in Isaiah 55, verse 8 and 9 which says that where God says my ways are not your ways my thoughts are not your thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts different from yours and my ways from your ways. It is impossible for us to understand God's methods.

There are many things in the world for which we don't have an explanation. But ultimately God's purpose is that he might have mercy on everyone and bring them back to himself. Those who will respond.

He does not force anyone. For who has known the mind of the Lord or become his counselor? Is there anyone who can know God's mind or wise enough to give counsel to God? Sometimes believers act as though they know better and begin to tell God what he should do. Listen to this verse.

Is there anyone who knows enough to give advice to God? When we pray do we try to give advice to God how he should work? Or do we ask him to work on our behalf? A lot of prayers that believers pray are giving advice to God to do this, do that, do the other thing. But we should be asking, not telling God how he should do certain things. We can ask for something and ask him to do it in his own way.

Verse 35 Is there anyone who can offer something to the Lord which is not belonging to God in the first place? Is there something we can give to God which God didn't give us so that God is in debt to us? Verse 35 says, who was first given to God that it might be paid back to him again? Do you think God is in debt to you? Not at all. From him, verse 36, through him and to him are all things to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

It says here everything originated from him. Everything. Do you have an ability? It could be a musical ability, it could be some spiritual gift or it could be health, it could be money.

When you give your money to God, where did that money originate from? It originated from God who created it, first of all, who gave you the intelligence and the health to work and to earn it on earth. There are many people your age who are not intelligent or healthy enough to have earned what you have earned. So who gave that to you? It was God.

It's from him. And the purpose of everything is that we might live our earthly life through his power, through him and ultimately give all the glory back to him. There are three things mentioned in verse 36 which are very important.

Everything originates from God. God's will is that we do everything through his power and not our own. And God's will, we can say thirdly, is that everything brings glory to him.

That's not because he selfishly desires glory. It's because he wants to save us from destroying ourselves. If we seek our own glory or one another's glory, we'll destroy ourselves.

But to him be the glory forever. So the thing I need to ask myself, you need to ask yourself is, in everything in your life, do you seek the will of God? To say, Lord, what is from you? I want to do that. Secondly, do you seek the power of God, the power of the Holy Spirit so that you can live for God in his power? And thirdly, do you do everything for God's glory? If you got the right answer to these questions, you can be a spiritual person.

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