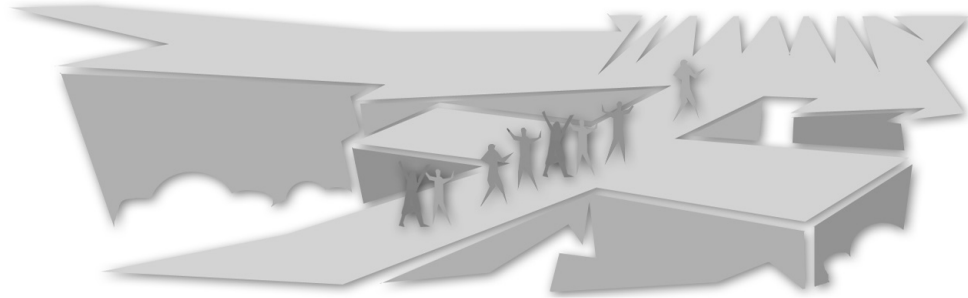


The Choice of Grace¹



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 10; Romans 11.

MEMORY VERSE: “So here is what I ask. Did God turn his back on his people? Not at all! I myself belong to Israel. I am one of Abraham’s children. I am from the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:1, Nlrv).

THIS WEEK'S LESSON COVERS ROMANS 10 AND 11. But we will pay special attention to chapter 11. It is important to read both chapters fully so that we can continue to follow Paul’s line of thinking.

These two chapters have been, and remain, an important part of many discussions. But one thing is clear through them all. That is God’s love for people. It is also His great desire to see all people saved. Romans 10 makes it very clear that “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek” (Romans 10:12, KJV). All are sinners, and all need God’s that which was given to the world through Jesus Christ. This grace is for everyone—not because of where you were born, or because of who you are. This grace comes not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus. He died as the Substitute² for sinners everywhere. Roles (kinds of work or positions) may change, but the plan of salvation never changes.

Paul continues with this theme (topic; idea) in chapter 11. When Paul talks about election (choosing) and calling, he is not talking about salvation. Instead, he is talking about the role in God’s plan for reaching the world. No group has been rejected for salvation.³ That was never the issue. After the Cross, Paul spread the gospel (good news) to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Then the early movement of believers, both Jews and Gentiles, took on the responsibility (work) of evangelizing the world.

1. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

3. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life, being saved from sin or evil.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 5**THE END (GOAL; PURPOSE) OF THE LAW (Romans 10:1–4)**

Read Romans 10:1–4. Remember everything that has been discussed before. Then ask yourself, What is the meaning of the message in Romans 10:1–4? How could we, today, be in danger of trying to trust in our “own righteousness”?

There are many different kinds of legalism.⁴ Some are more “covered-up” than others. Legalism is practiced by those who trust only in themselves, their good actions, their diet, how strictly they keep the Sabbath, all the bad things they do not do, or all the good things that they have done. They are the ones falling into the trap of legalism. Every minute of our lives, we must remember that the holiness of God is against our own sinfulness. That is the surest way to protect ourselves from the kind of thinking that makes people believe they can be saved by their “own righteousness [good works; acts].” This is very different from the righteousness of Christ.⁵

Romans 10:4 is an important verse that explains the basic part of Paul’s entire message to the Romans. First, we need to know the original (first) meaning. Many Jews “tried to get right with God in their own way” (Romans 10:3, NIV). But with the

coming of the Messiah (Chosen One), the true way of righteousness was shown. Righteousness was offered to all who would put their faith in Christ. Jesus was the One that the sanctuary system of the Jews pointed to all along.

A person may think that “end of the law means that the Ten Commandments no longer need to be obeyed. But this does not mean that the Ten Commandments were removed. The moral law⁶ points out our sins, our faults, and our shortcomings. It also leads us to our need of a Savior, our need of forgiveness, our need of righteousness. But all of these things are found only in Jesus. In that sense, Christ is the “end” of the law. In other words, the law leads us to Him and His righteousness. The Greek word for “end” here is *telos*, which means “goal” or “purpose.” Christ is the final purpose of the law. This means that the main purpose of the law is to lead us to Jesus.



The law leads to Jesus.

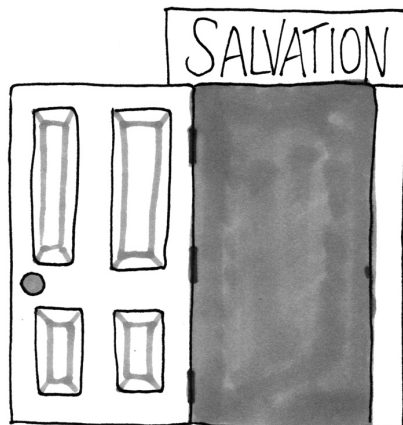
4. legalism—belief that one can be saved by obeying the law.

5. righteousness of Christ—God’s character (the qualities, such as goodness and love, that make Him who He is). God’s character, or righteousness (holy life), is given to us by faith in Him; holiness.

6. moral law—the Ten Commandments.

To read this verse as if it meant that the Ten Commandments have been removed is wrong. This is not what Paul and the New Testament teach.

Do you ever find yourself proud about how much better you are than others? Maybe you are “better,” but so what? Compare⁷ yourself to Christ, and then think about how “good” you really are.



Salvation is open to all who accept it.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 6

THE ELECTION OF GRACE (Romans 11:1–7)

What common teaching do the verses in Romans 11:1–7 clearly deny?

Paul is giving the first part of his answer to the question, “Did God turn his back on his people?” (NIRV). Paul points to a remnant (small, faithful group), who have been chosen by God, as proof that God has not rejected His people. Salvation is open for all who accept it, Jew and Gentile alike.

It should be remembered that the early believers of Christianity were all Jews. They were the group that was converted⁸ on the Day of Pentecost.⁹ It took a special vision¹⁰ and miracle¹¹

to make Peter understand that the Gentiles had the same rights to the grace of Christ (Acts 10; read also Acts 15:7–9). Peter learned that the Gentiles had the right to receive the gospel too.

Read Romans 11:7–10. Is Paul saying that God caused Israel to be blind to salvation because they rejected Jesus? What is wrong with that idea?

In these verses, Paul quotes from the Old Testament. The Jews accepted this quote as a command from God. Paul uses these verses to show that God has caused Israel to fall into a spirit of slumber (sleep), which prevents (stops) them from seeing and hearing (understanding). Does God

7. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

8. converted—to have become a disciple (follower) of God; to be born again.

9. Pentecost—the time when Jesus’ followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus rose from the dead and went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

10. vision—a special message from God that is seen in the mind or in a dream or in a trance to help a person know God’s will (plan).

11. miracle—an extraordinary (amazing; great) event believed to be a sign of the power of God. Jesus’ raising Lazarus from the dead is an example of a miracle.

blind people to prevent them from seeing light that would lead them to salvation? Never! To understand these verses we need to remember our explanation of Romans 9. Paul is not talking about the salvation of certain people. God does not reject any one group as a whole for salvation. The issue really depends on how these people do His work.

What is wrong with the idea that God has rejected saving any group of people as a whole? Why does that go against the whole teaching of the gospel, which shows that Christ died to save all people? For example, how has believing this wrong idea caused certain Christians to treat the Jews unfairly throughout history?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 7

THE GRAFTED¹² BRANCH (Romans 11:11–15)

What great hope does Paul give in Romans 11:11–15?

In these verses, we find two examples that are almost the same: (1) “their [the Israelites] fullness” (verse 12, NIV), and (2) “the receiving of them [the Israelites]” (verse 15, NIV). Paul expected the casting away (rejection) of the Jews to last a short time and to be followed by their full acceptance. This is Paul’s second answer to the question at the begin-

ning of this chapter, “Did God turn his back on his people?” (NIV). Paul says that even though it seems that God is rejecting His people, it will last only a short time.

What is Paul saying to us in Romans 11:16–24?

Paul compares the small faithful group in Israel to a noble olive tree. Some of the tree’s branches have broken off (the unbelieving ones). Paul used this example to prove that “God hath not cast away [rejected] his people” (verse 2). The root and trunk are still there.



Paul compares the faithful ones in Israel to a noble olive tree.

Into this tree the believing Gentiles have been grafted (put in). But they are receiving their sap¹³ and life from the root and trunk. This idea represents (shows) believing Israel.

What happened to those who rejected Jesus also could happen to the believing Gentiles. The Bible does not

12. grafted—to make something become part of something else; to attach a part of a plant to another plant.

13. sap—a watery juice inside a plant that carries the plant’s food.

teach the doctrine (belief) of “once saved, always saved” at all. Just as God freely offers salvation, people can reject it freely. We have to be careful of thinking that every time we fall we are out of salvation or that if we are not perfect we are not saved. But we also need to avoid the opposite idea that once God’s grace covers us, there is nothing we can do to have salvation taken away from us. In the end, only those who “continue in his [God’s] goodness” (verse 22, KJV) will be saved.

No believer should brag about his or her own goodness or feel he or she is better than other people. Our salvation is not earned. It is a gift. In front of the Cross, the standard of God’s holiness, we are all equal. We are sinners in need of God’s mercy¹⁴ and holiness and that can be ours only through grace. We have nothing of ourselves to boast about. Our boasting should be only in Jesus and what He has done for us by coming into this world as a Man. He has suffered our woes. He died for our sins. He offered Himself to be a model (example) for how we should live. And He promised us the power to live that life. In the end, we are completely dependent upon Jesus. This is because without Jesus we would have no hope beyond what this world itself offers.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 8

A MYSTERY¹⁵ REVEALED (SHOWN) (Romans 11:25–27)



Though some of the olive tree’s branches (unbelievers) have been broken off, the root and the trunk are still there.

What great event is Paul foretelling in Romans 11:25–27?

Christians have been discussing and arguing over these verses for hundreds of years. But a few points are clear. For starters, the main theme (idea; topic) is that of God reaching out to the Jews. What Paul is saying comes in answer to the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, “Did God turn his back on his people?” (NIRV). Paul’s answer, of course, is No. His explanation is (1) that the blindness (Greek *porosis*, “hardness”) is only “in part.” And (2) that it will last only a short time, “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (NKJV).

What does “the fullness of the Gentiles” mean? Many think the wording means when the gospel command¹⁶ has been fulfilled (done). This also means that all the world has heard the gospel. “The fullness of the Gentiles” has come in when the gospel has been preached everywhere. The faith

14. mercy—kindness or help given to people who are in a very bad or desperate situation.

15. mystery—anything that cannot be fully understood or explained.

16. gospel command—Jesus’ command to His disciples (followers) to spread the gospel, or the good news that He saves us from our sins and gives us eternal (forever) life.

of Israel, shown in Christ, has spread all over the world. The gospel has been preached to all the world. The coming of Jesus is near. At this point, many Jews would start coming to Jesus.

Another difficult point is the meaning of “all Israel shall be saved” (verse 26). We should not think this means that every Jew will, by God’s command, have salvation in the end time. The Bible does not teach that every group of people or only one special group will be saved. Paul was hoping to save “some of them” (verse 14). Some accepted the Messiah and some rejected Him. The same is true with all people.

Talking about Romans 11, Ellen G. White says that when the gospel comes to a close, “many of the Jews . . . will by faith receive Christ as their Savior.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 381.

Take some time to think about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. How could a careful study of the Jewish religion help you better understand your Christian faith?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 9

THE SALVATION OF SINNERS (Romans 11:28–36)

Paul’s love for his own people is clearly shown in Romans 11:28–36. It must have been very hard for Paul to have some of his own people fight

against him and against the truth of the gospel. But he still believed that many would accept Jesus as the Messiah.

How does Paul show God’s love in Romans 11:28–36, not just for the Jews but for all people? How does Paul show the wonderful and mysterious¹⁷ power of God’s grace?

These verses may show a sharp difference between Jews and Gentiles. But one point is clear: God’s mercy and love and grace are poured out upon all sinners. Even before the beginning of the world, God’s plan was to save people and to use other humans, even whole nations, as tools to fulfill His will (plan).

Read verse 31 carefully and prayerfully. What important point should we learn from this verse about our witness,¹⁸ not just to Jews but to all people whom we meet?

It is very likely that if the Christian church had treated the Jews better throughout history, many more might have accepted Jesus as their Messiah. There was a turning away from the teachings of Jesus in the early centuries¹⁹ after Christ. And many churches introduced pagan²⁰ ideas into the Christian church. They also rejected the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday. These things did not make it any easier for the Jews

17. mysterious—strange, unknown, or difficult to understand.

18. witness—to tell other people about the goodness of God and His love for them through your words and the loving deeds (acts) you do for them.

19. centuries—hundreds of years.

20. pagan—having to do with the worship of many gods or goddesses or the worship of the earth or nature.

who might have accepted Jesus.

It is so important for all Christians to accept the mercy that has been given to them in Jesus. But they also need to show mercy to others. We cannot be Christians if we do not show mercy to others (read Matthew 18:23–36).

Is there someone to whom you need to show mercy, who perhaps does not deserve it? Why not show this person that mercy, no matter how hard that might be? Is that not what Jesus has done for us?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Before the Sanhedrin,”²¹ pages 77–79; “From Persecutor²² to Disciple [Follower],” pages 112–114; “Written From Rome,” pages 474, 475, in *The Acts of the Apostles*,²³ “Reaching Catholics,” pages 573–577, in *Evangelism*,²⁴ “What to Preach and Not to Preach,” pages 155, 156, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“In the closing preaching of the gospel, special work will be done for classes of forgotten people. God expects His messengers to take special interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. The Old Testament verses will be blended with the New in explaining God’s eternal [forever; without

end] purpose. To many Jews, this will be as the dawn of a new creation and the renewal of the soul. The Jews will find the Christ of the New Testament pictured in the pages of the Old Testament. Then they will understand how clearly the New Testament explains the Old. Their sleeping minds will be awakened. And they will recognize Christ as the Savior of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Savior.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 381.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In the last days, God’s law and the Sabbath will gain greater interest with the people. So, it would not be any surprise to find that the Jews do a better job of teaching some issues to the world, would it not? After all, when it comes to Sabbath keeping, Seventh-day Adventists, not the Jews, are “the new kids on the block.” Discuss.
- ② Why should, of all churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Church be the one most successful in reaching out to Jews? What can you or your local church do in trying to reach Jews in your community?²⁵
- ③ What can we learn from the mistakes of many in the Israel of Bible times? How can we avoid making the same mistakes today?

21. Sanhedrin—the highest Jewish governing council.

22. persecutor—someone who tortures (hurts) other people.

23. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

24. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

25. community—a group of people living, working, or worshiping together.