

An Exposition On Romans Chapter Eleven

This chapter has been used by dispensationalists to attempt to validate a yet golden era for national Israel. They make a distinction between the times of the Gentiles (or the fullness of the Gentiles) and the political restoration of the Jews. According to this teaching, we are presently in a parenthetical dispensation sandwiched between the Old Testament and a Millennium of peace and ascendancy of the Jewish nation. It is my objective, by way of a verse by verse exposition, to establish the intent and theme of the chapter and hopefully make clear some rather oblique verses that seem to agree with the popular dispensational theory. In fact this chapter has become the one and only New Testament stronghold of this doctrine. The premise of this paper is that Paul's words here are not an isolated passage referring to a great future event, but rather another description of the present state of the Kingdom of God, the Church.

Verses 1-10

Throughout the book of Romans Paul poses rhetorical questions to dismiss myths and misunderstandings. One example of this is found in chapter six when the proposition is made; "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" The answer of course is 'no' but Paul takes the rest of the chapter to explain why. This style of teaching is found again in this chapter. Because Paul, a Jew, was well known as the Apostle to the Gentiles, there were many misunderstandings about what he was teaching concerning the Jew/Gentile relationship. People, being what they are, tend to overreact to anything new and take issues to extremes. Some, evidently in both camps, had come to the conclusion that since the Gospel was being preached and received by the Gentiles, that the Jews had been rejected by God. We often hear this same idea today as a precursor to a time when God is going to again turn back to the Jews. Please notice the question and Paul's answer. "...has God cast away His people?" The response is an emphatic; "Certainly not." This is an important point. If there is no rejection of the Jews then there is no necessity of their restoration. Paul refers to himself as an example of a Jewish beneficiary of the Gospel. A reference is made to God's foreknowledge. The foundation of the Kingdom of God has always rested on the fact that the Lord knows those that are His. This knowledge cannot be perceived on the basis of nationality or religious affiliation. God alone really knows and we mortals are left to guess. This is illustrated in God's response to the despondent Elijah who had despaired of finding anyone faithful in Israel. God had reserved to Himself seven thousand uncompromising souls unbeknown to the prophet. The present composition of the church of that day was Paul's third reference to dispel this rejection myth. The Gospel had been presented to the Jew first and then to the Greek. Romans 1:16 Consequently thousands of Jews believed that Jesus was their Messiah. In Jerusalem alone this was true. Acts 21:20 Certainly this did not indicate a rejection of the Jewish people.

The premise for the selection of God's elect has always been on the basis of God's grace and has never been predicated on the works of the law. A thorough study of the Old Testament will reveal that God has time and time again gone beyond the natural privileges and expectations of a firstborn such as Esau to select a person responsive to His grace. God never obligates Himself to the efforts of the flesh to 'capture Him.'

From this point in the chapter a distinction is made between the Jewish believers and Jewish

non-believers. They become two separate economies in the Divine Program. In the believers, God's promise to Abraham and the words of the prophets are fulfilled as to the promised glory of Israel. Through the unbelievers arises the occasion for grace to be extended to receptive Gentiles. One group beholds their Messiah, while the other is blinded and still searching for Him. Even in their resistance they perfectly fulfill Isaiah's prophecy which they read to their own condemnation. It's important to understand that Jewish Christians are ever as much Israelites, racially, as their unbelieving cousins. If God so wills, their faith can better represent the nation than the infidelity of the Christ haters.

Verses 11-15

Another rhetorical question appears in verse eleven in reference to the unbelievers. ". . . have they stumbled that they should fall?" The Message Bible words the question this way; "...are they down for the count? Are they out of this for good?" In other words, are they beyond recovery? Is it too late? The answer comes with emphasis; "Certainly not!" This is important for the Gentile believers to know lest they develop a spiteful and condescending attitude toward them. One of the God-ordained effects of the Gentiles being remarkably blessed by the Gospel was to provoke more Jews to become Christians. The Christian world is still a positive provocation to the Jewish people. Their conversion is a very desirable thing with God. What rich heritage they can bring into the church! A converted Jew represents; an elect among a chosen people, a legacy of God's glorious manifestations, a recipient of ancient covenants, the scholarship of the greatest law ever given, the practice and method of worship as foreshadowed under the law, and a natural descendant of some of the greatest men who have ever lived. It was Paul's fervent desire to see his fellow countrymen saved by grace. It would be great boon to them and to the kingdom of God.

Verses 16-24

The Jewish believers are distinguished as first fruits among other believers. See James 1:1,18 First fruits represent the kind and the quality of the rest of the crop. (referred to in the text as 'the lump.')

If the first fruits are holy it bespeaks the nature of the entire church. The very source of holiness being from the root which is Jesus. The individual members of His Church are represented by the branches which are to share in His holiness. See John 15 In the case of continual unfruitfulness the vinedresser retains the right to prune the unproductive branches. Paul uses this analogy to describe the unbelieving Jews' lost position in the redemptive program.

The inclusion of the Gentiles is likened unto a grafting process which is an ingenuous allowance of nature. The non-Jewish believers in Rome were admonished to remain humble in their attitude toward the skeptical Jews and to learn from them that the severity of God is without respect of persons. Every branch maintains its position only as long as faith is vital in that branch. "Otherwise you will also be cut off." (The doctrine of Eternal Security takes a severe beating at this point.) Paul proposes the possibility of God sovereignly restoring the branches back again provided they forsake their unbelief. There is no indication of a national restoration in this passage but simply a provision for the repentance of individual Jews. An open invitation remains in effect to Abraham's natural descendants to come to Christ, have their blindness healed, and enter into the fullness of the covenant God made with their father. The Gentile believers must humbly and joyfully anticipate this possibility.

Verses 25-29

Paul is still addressing his remarks to the Gentile believers in Rome warning them against any anti-Semitic attitudes. There is a masterful mystery involved in both Israel's acceptance and rejection of Jesus Christ. As believers they became examples (first fruits) of the church. As unbelievers they gave a reason for the Gospel to be preached to the rest of the world. Consequently much good came from both reactions. It is important to notice the blindness 'in part' and not of the whole is noted here. There is a tendency to take the negative and blanket the entire Jewish community with it. Only unbelievers are blinded. Their pitiful dilemma was to serve as a reminder to the Gentile believers how costly the Jewish default had been and how fortunate they were to have spiritual eyes to see. Their fullness was the result of an unclaimed inheritance.

To some (dispensationalists) verse twenty six indicates a sequence of events indicating the future restoration of national Israel. By the way many interpret this verse you would think that it says, "and then all Israel will be saved" instead of "and so all Israel will be saved." The notes in the Spirit Filled Life Bible render this verse; "and so (or in this way) all Israel will be saved. It is the process that Paul has been referring to throughout the chapter. The usage of the words 'all Israel' is a collective term signifying all of God's people. It is inconceivable that it is referring to every individual Jew. God would have to resurrect all unbelieving Jews from the dead and convert them in order to 'literally' fulfill this scripture. The reference from Isaiah fifty nine underscores that the promise of salvation has come to the Jews through Jesus Christ. In mystery it included the whole world of believers as the 'Israel of God.'

In verse 28 the two Jewish communities are reviewed; the unbelievers as enemies of the Gospel defaulting their privileges to the Gentile world, and the elect as beloved and true heirs of the promises made to their fathers. Some would like to somehow make the unbelievers both enemies and beloved at the same time. That is rather difficult to grasp.

Verses 30-36

Paul again addresses the Gentiles about their unwarranted privilege stemming from the obstinance of the Jews and reminds them of the possibility of their personal restoration. As great mercy had been extended to them by way of the Jews, it was incumbent upon them to think of the wayward ones in the most merciful frame of mind and heart. Their regenerated attitude could lead to the conversion of more Jews. The phenomenal wisdom crafting this entire plot makes every member of the body of Christ, regardless of race, a recipient of God's great mercy, and interdependent upon every other member. God took a proud discriminating Jew, humbled him and affiliated him with Gentiles as his equal, and gave him the task of world evangelism. He took a hurt and resentful Gentile, humbled him and taught him to be respectful and loving toward both believing and non believing Jews. How marvelously God broke down the middle wall of petition that separated people racially and spiritually. A new race appears arising out of every tribe and tongue. This collaborates with the theme that Paul has reiterated in his other epistles.

“...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised,
barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all”

Colossians 3:11

Conclusion

It is to the glory of God that the race factor once and for all be eliminated in the kingdom of God by mutual respect of every member of the body of Christ. It is interesting to me that Jewish genealogies lead up to and cease with Christ both in the Book of Matthew and Luke. In my opinion, it is extremely detrimental to reconstruct a national hierarchy that has been dismantled time and time again. It is an operation of the flesh and not of the Spirit. Let us glory in the Kingdom of God now in process and pray for the conversion of Jews as individuals. They desperately need Jesus.

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