

Sermons through

Romans

Their Failure, Their Fullness

Part Two

Provoked to Jealousy

Romans 11:11-15

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
12/13/2015*

Their Failure, Their Fullness

Part Two

Provoked to Jealousy

Romans 11:11-15

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. ¹² Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are my flesh* and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead (Romans 11:11-15)?

Introduction

We had mentioned last time that there is some legitimacy in the notion that God works in mysterious ways. The very passage we're examining today contains the disclosure of a mystery that the Apostle Paul did not want his readers to miss.

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25).

A mystery *mysterion* is not a contradiction, nor is it merely an escape clause for something inexplicable. It is generally referring to something unknown or unanticipated then revealed or disclosed (Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3). Is God still working in mysterious ways? Yes, but we do not have modern day prophets or apostles who can lift the veil of God's secret counsel as we see here with the Apostle.

The comfort of our souls is in the knowledge that our Father in heaven has things well in hand. And He will providentially reveal to us that which we need to know when we need to know it.

When we take our family to the theatre or an amusement park, we do not give the children their tickets until they're standing in line. There is no reason for them to have them before then – they may lose them or trade them for magic beans. God will let us know what we need to know, when we need to know it. Then we are called to respond appropriately.

In order for us to grasp the passage before us it would be helpful for us to know that we are observing in the gospels and letters of the New Testament is a transition from the Old to New Covenant. God had preserved Israel because it would be through Israel that the seed – that is Christ – would come. It is for this reason that two of the four gospels (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38) begin with a genealogy.

But it was always God's plan to save the world (John 3:17), not merely one nation. This goes all the way back – clearly seen in the promise made to Abraham:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

What would the fulfillment of this promise look like? We should not be ignorant of this. It should not have even been a mystery.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:8, 9).

God had made a promise. He had kept that promise – a promise which is to be preached; and to which there is to be a response of faith and repentance.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are

far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself (Acts 2:38, 39).

God had not failed to keep His promise (Romans 9:6) as some were supposing. God's promise was not merely that He would send His Son to save sinners but that He would call sinners to Himself (Acts 2:39). But whether it was the Old Covenant or New Covenant, the instrument by which God would save was faith—Abel offered a sacrifice in faith—by faith Enoch did not see death—by faith Noah constructed an ark—by faith Abraham obeyed—whether Old or New without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11). One is not saved by works or by inclusion in a community—even the covenant community. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

The community of which Paul was part had lost sight of that. And instead of repenting, they—as men are accustomed to do—were accusing. The question Paul was addressing was, what of that community? What of Israel? Toward the end of chapter nine Paul conveyed that if not for the seed they would have had the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Romans 9:29). Of course now the seed (Christ) had come, so would they have the fate of Sodom? The answer was 'no'.

But let us not draw the conclusion that because God chooses not to judge in history (as with Sodom) that those from whom He has withheld judgment have somehow found favor in His sight—as many Bible teachers tend to do with Israel in this passage. The great error of Israel—the great error of many religious communities—is to assume that being part of a religion is the answer to man's dilemma with sin and death. As this very passage tells us, the Apostle Paul's great desire was that those who were his "**flesh**" might be saved (Romans 11:14).

Many Christians today find themselves discouraged and perplexed by the religious, political and cultural environment in which we find ourselves. How much more was this true during the writing of this epistle! There was very little faith to be found in the covenant community (a mere remnant—Romans 11:5), the political climate was hostile (For God's sake they were killed all day long: accounted as sheep for the slaughter—Romans 8:36) and there was conflict within the church itself (Romans 2).

The Apostle gives the ministerial answer to these conflicts and confusions. He is defending the very trustworthiness of God (Romans 9:6)

while his heart aches for his apostate fellow Israelite countrymen (Romans 9:3; 10:1; 11:14), though his specific ministry was to the gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; Galatians 1:16; 2:7-9; Ephesians 3:8).

He will begin to reveal the providential works of God as it speaks to the ethnic Israelite, the Israelite of promise and the gentiles. It also shows that God is indeed faithful to His covenant. And in so doing Paul finds a comfort which yields the inevitable doxology.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)!

So what is the providential working which leads to the doxology? The Israelites, for the most part wanted nothing of Jesus. There was a remnant of faithful believers within Israel (Romans 11:2-5) but what of the rest? Paul rhetorically asks if **“they stumbled that they should fall?”** And the answer was **“Certainly not” (Romans 11:11a)!** They had not reached a point where they were unredeemable. There was still hope and a plan.

The Apostle now reveals that plan. He will now explain the mystery – a mystery which includes the provocation of jealousy – the value of their failure and the joy of their acceptance.

But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come to the Gentiles.* ¹² Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are my flesh and save some of them.* ¹⁵ For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead (Romans 11:11-15)?

Jealousy

Part of this mysterious plan is how the Jews will be provoked to jealousy through the salvation of the gentiles. I must admit that I would not have anticipated this as part of the plan of salvation. We might be tempted to view this method as fickle; the way someone in a relationship

will get the attention of their partner by flirting with someone else with the goal of making them jealous.

First we must realize that jealousy *parazelosai* is not necessarily a bad thing. In the Ten Commandments we read that God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:6). It might be helpful to make a distinction between jealousy and envy *phthonos*. Envy is wanting that which rightfully belongs to someone else and jealous is a response to someone taking that which is rightfully yours.

When God says He is jealous it is not an expression of His insecurity. He conveys the attribute of jealousy in light of His people seeking to create a false image, thus leading them away from His loving guidance – the way a parent might feel jealousy when they observe their child idolizing the neighborhood hooligan. The direction that hooligan leads them will never match the love and wisdom of the parent – how much more with God!

So we shouldn't understand a passage like this to be God tempting the Israelite to an inappropriate passion. In a certain sense the gentiles are fully receiving those covenant promises/privileges which the Israelites viewed as theirs. The Apostle began this entire section writing of the Israelites...

...to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Romans 9:4).

But they had so distorted the truth that it had become almost unrecognizable as a covenant of grace. They transformed the gift of God (as religious pursuits tend to do) into a quest of man. Paul had earlier taught what the Gentiles did not pursue they still attained against what Israel did pursue yet did not attain.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Why? Because *they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling*

stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" (Romans 9:30-33).

And of course the "**stumbling stone**" and "**rock of offense**" was Christ Himself, whose yoke is easy and burden is light (Matthew 11:28). One is invited to strap himself to the efforts of men or the grace of God.

By grace through faith the Gentiles and a remnant of faithful Israel had obtained that which the works of a religious community could never obtain. It was Paul's great desire that those who were his "**flesh**" would be provoked to jealousy when they saw that that which was promised in their midst and that which they strove with so much effort to attain, was freely given to the faithful:

- Israel was promised the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27) but in Romans 8:4 this promise is fulfilled in the church.
- Israel had been promised a future resurrection (Ezekiel 37) but Paul tells the church God, who raised Christ will give life to your mortal bodies (Romans 8:10-11).
- Israel was God's son (Exodus 4:22) now believers in Christ are sons and daughters (Romans 8:14-17).
- An inheritance was promised to Israel (Isaiah 60) but now the believer is the "joint heir" with Christ (Romans 8:17).
- Israel was God's chosen people (Amos 3:2) but Paul aims this blessed designation to those who have faith in Christ (Roman 8:29-30).
- God had promised never to forsake Israel (Deuteronomy 31:6) but it is the church – the believer – who can have the assurance that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:39).

It might be important to note just what it was that Paul was hoping the Israelite would be jealous of. What was he hoping they would see in

the covenant community that would that would cause their hearts to “**burn within**” them (Luke 24:32)?

Here we must be careful, for the church has become a bit of a strip-mall designed to meet the various social, material and psychological needs of the modern man. We come with our insecurities, heartaches, loneliness, frustrations, fears and families – hoping our religious pursuits will provide the answers. And I think it is appropriate for a good church (and by ‘church’ here I mean the entire fellowship with all the various gifts God has given to the individuals) to address all these things and more.

But the jealousy of which Paul writes is not a jealousy of good marriages, lucrative jobs, psychological security, physical health and well-being, friendships or any other number of things we would all enjoy having. It is a jealousy of having favor with God and the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). Thinking of human relationships, a man is jealous not because some other man has his wife’s possessions, but his wife’s attention or affection.

From time to time people will switch churches because one church has what another is lacking. It might be the music, the youth group, the focus on marriage and family, the Sunday school program, etc. One might say they’re jealous of what the other church is offering. But what we really want people to be jealous of – and strongly desire – is peace with God through Christ. If that is the central focus of the church, we can rest assured that all other secondary issues will be appropriately addressed.

We will next time discuss why Paul mentions his ministry to the Gentiles, what it means when he writes of “**their fullness**” and their “**acceptance**” being “**life from the dead**”. But let us conclude with our hearts set on that which is the rudder of the Christian faith – without which souls and churches are shipwrecked (1 Timothy 1:19) – that peace with God through the cross of Christ must ever be the message.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

Questions for Study

1. What is a mystery as we read in Scripture? How can we take comfort in knowing God works in mysterious ways (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the context of Romans 9-11 and why it is important in understanding these chapters (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is the Abrahamic Covenant and how do we see it fulfilled (pages 3, 4)?
4. What is God's covenant/promise and how is it fulfilled (page 4)?
5. Is God's lack of immediate judgment a sign of His favor? Explain (page 4)?
6. Had Israel stumbled that they should fall? What is meant by that (page 5)?
7. Is jealousy good or bad? Explain (pages 5, 6).
8. How did jealousy play into God's plan for redeeming Israelites (pages 6, 7)?
9. What did the gentiles find without looking that Israel did not find? Explain (pages 6, 7).
10. What was Paul hoping the Israelites would be jealous of (page 7, 8)?