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Romans

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Romans 11:7

The previous verses were speaking of grace being grace - unmerited favor apart from works. This is the state of the remnant Jews who are a part of God's election. Based on this, Paul now asks, "What then?" What is the result for the rest of the Jews who are not a part of this process of election? For an answer, Paul now cites them as "Israel." In other words, the majority is spoken of as the whole. "Israel has not obtained what it seeks."

The nation has failed to attain the very thing for which it was continuously noted. In the world of the Roman empire, the majority of the people groups sought after power and wealth. Although this was certainly the case with many individual Jews, the overall aim of the nation wasn't power or wealth, but righteousness. However, in their search for attaining righteousness, they became blinded to the only One who could make them righteous.

We could ask, whose fault was this? Directly from Scripture, we can see that it was a national, self-inflicted wound because there were individuals who in fact did recognize Christ's coming. Zachariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, heard and believed. Simeon and Anna who saw the Child when He was brought to the temple recognized Him.

From this springboard came the apostles and disciples and others noted in the gospel record. After the resurrection, 3000 were saved on the day of Pentecost. These and others recorded in the gospels and Acts show that even though Israel failed in this regard, a portion of the nation obtained the favored status of God's election; they became the elect. But if the remnant is the elect, then there is an opposite side to the coin. Paul explains that "the rest were blinded."

The word used for "were blinded" is the Greek word epōrōthēsan. It comes from a word which was applied to bony formations on joints; a callus or a spur. The thought then is something that is petrified or covered with a callous. In the New Testament, it is used only five times, each in a figurative sense. John 12:40 uses it when citing Isaiah -

"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with their eyes,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them." John 12:40

Here we have a question to consider then. "How were they hardened?" The Bible doesn't tell us. In the case of the elect, it says that they have obtained that status "according to the election of grace" (v. 6). Thus it was of God. However, in the case of those who were hardened, the Bible only notes that it is so, but without designating the source.

Those who recognized the Messiah were given grace; those who rejected Him were hardened. What can be inferred then is that the action is passive on the part of God concerning their hardening. To understand this, think of a group of people stuck in a large pit in the ground. In the pit are the instructions to get out of the pit, but they lack the skills to fully comply with the instructions. In the instructions though, it tells that a way will be made available by the author who wrote the instructions for them to get out of the pit.

Eventually, the author of the instructions lowers a line down for the people. Those who recognize that this is the pre-mentioned way of getting out of the pit take hold of the rope and are pulled out. Despite this, there are those who stubbornly set about and continue to work on the instructions, never realizing that those instructions, though complete, are incapable of getting the people out of the pit, not because the instructions were faulty, but because the skills needed to comply with them were lacking. Only what the instructions promise - the rope - could do it. They become so obsessed with following the instructions, that they actually miss the grace of the rope. Eventually, the pit consumes them. What they sought they did not find, and it was solely their own fault for failing to lift their eyes and see that a way had been prepared for them. The hardening was passive - "Ok, have it your way..."

Life application: The instructions from God, in fact, point to the proper means of being reconciled to God. The law was intended to lead the people to understand their need for Christ, but in their zeal for the law, they missed its purpose. This still happens today. People fail to see Christ as the fulfillment and the end of the law and attempt to reinsert the law where it doesn't belong, thus condemning themselves. Christ is the end of the law for all who believe; therefore, believe and be saved.

Just as it is written:

**"God has given them a spirit of stupor,
Eyes that they should not see
And ears that they should not hear,
To this very day. Romans 11:8**

The previous verse noted that the elect had obtained what the majority had missed because they were blinded. To support this, Paul reaches again to Scripture which prophesied these things in advance. He begins with, "Just as it is written..." Though this is not a direct quote, it holds the same intent and sentiment of his citations. These are from the following verses found in Deuteronomy and Isaiah -

"Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day." Deuteronomy 29:4

"For the Lord has poured out on you
The spirit of deep sleep,
And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;
And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers." Isaiah 29:10

Understanding these references, Paul states that "God has given them..." It is God who is both in control of all things and who knows the end from the beginning. He knows the wickedness of the heart of man and their propensity for turning from Him. Saying, "God has given them" doesn't necessarily mean God actively did this, but that the action could have occurred passively. God gives the law; the people ignorantly turn from the law on their own accord because they find it offensive; God said it would happen and therefore it can be stated "God has given them."

A perfect example of this today is the complete turning away from God's fixed and unchanging laws in the church. Homosexual marriage, for example, has now been condoned in many major denominations and others are running toward the same pulpit of perversion to join in the debauchery. They have been given what they desired by their own wicked inclinations. They hear, but they don't understand and they see but they don't perceive. Jesus speaks this way about Israel in Matthew 13:10-17.

The state which God has given them is first called "a spirit of stupor." Here is the only use of the word *katanyxeōs* in the New Testament. The word specifically indicates a violent strike; the figurative intent then is the stunned bewilderment which happens after such a strike, as if "seeing stars." The word of God is direct and poignant. It relates absolute truth and often it is so directed at the sins of those who read it that it cuts to the deepest seat of emotion.

When this happens, it can affect a great change in the soul who so desperately wants to be free of the addiction or perversion which is pointed out. But the

opposite is also true. Some who are confronted with the direct and unwavering truth of Scripture mentally cut off the assault as if it were a ridiculous lie. When this happens, the one so assailed will attempt to diminish the truth of what was read by downplaying the divine source of the words; making personal exceptions for what is stated; outright rejection of God because of what they feel is "unfair"; etc. Instead, a "spirit of stupor" sets in.

Along with this come "eyes that they should not see." A spirit of stupor will immediately cloud one's vision of what is right. A sad example of this is still seen in the people of Israel today. They have twice been exiled for disobedience. During the second dispersion, which began in AD70, there were 2000 years of calamity. Whose fault was this? If one reads and accepts the words of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, then there can only be one acceptable answer - the wounds were self-inflicted. But their eyes will not allow the message to reach into the heart. Instead of acceptance, there is projection of the fault in outward directions.

Even when told by others that God's word is true and is to be taken at face value, there is no understanding because they have also been given "ears that they should not hear." The stupor blocks out the information. There is a stubborn refusal to acknowledge personal guilt and personal responsibility. And this has been going on, according to Scripture, for 3500 years. Moses told them of their attitude, Isaiah and the other prophets repeated it, and the New Testament continues on as a witness to it, even "to this very day."

Only when a person is willing to remove the blinders and acknowledge that they are part of the problem and not a part of the solution will they see Scripture for what it truly is - God's word. It is truthful, predictive, unchanging, and mixed with warnings of wrath for disobedience and favor for obedience. God is God, we are humans. Until we accept Him at His word, there will only be resistance leading to a spirit of stupor.

Life application: Though Paul is speaking of Israel's spirit of stupor, blindness, and deafness, this same state applies to any who look at God's word and then dismiss

a portion or all of it as unreliable. A perfect example of this is the ordination of women to become pastors. Scripture prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). However, this is rejected, not based on any reasonable defense, but because of a spirit of stupor. Whatever the word says has been given by God. He is God, we are humans. We must accept His word, lest we be found to fight against Him.

And David says:

**"Let their table become a snare and a trap,
A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Romans 11:9**

Verse 9 is an amended quote from Psalm 69:22 -

"Let their table become a snare before them,
And their well-being a trap."

"And David says" is no different here than saying, "Scripture says" or "God has said." This is the wondrous nature of the Word of God. What is spoken by a man is actually a thought breathed out by God through that man. There is a harmonious blending of God's word with the uniqueness of the person relaying that word, in style, in emotion, and in thought.

This psalm is used on several occasions in the New Testament as pointing to Christ. The verse just prior to this one, verse 21, is certainly Messianic in nature -

"They also gave me gall for my food,
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Matthew 27:34 shows its fulfillment in the offering of sour wine mixed with gall to Christ at the crucifixion. Understanding this context, we can see that Paul's citing

of it is not intended as an imprecation by him toward the Jews, but rather as prior predictions which would come about on them. Because of their rejection of Jesus, the One who fulfilled their Scriptures which are the written basis of what established them as a people, the result would be that God would "let their table become a snare and a trap."

The table is the place where one partakes in God's blessing in the most personal manner. It is a place of sharing in the abundance the Lord provides, relaxing while enjoying it, and fellowshiping with those who unwind at the same table. The symbolism of it is seen in a most notable way in the 23rd Psalm -

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies..."

David's table was set "in the presence of" his enemies. In other words, he could relax and enjoy God's abundance without fear. His enemies were subdued and so nothing would disturb his moment of ease, fellowship, and nourishment. In contrast to this, the Jews who had rejected Christ were now Christ's enemies. In this special place where they would look for peace, blessing, and abundance, instead they would find a "snare" and a "trap."

The snare is the Greek word pagida. It carries the notion of "making fast." An anchor, for example, is called a pagis; it makes fast the ship. This implement then is used figuratively in a moral sense to steal away the spiritual blessings that the Lord would otherwise provide. Each time this word is used in the New Testament it follows along with this figurative sense.

The "trap" is the Greek word theran, literally "a hunting." This is its only use in the Bible, but the sense of it is possibly that of a net. The snare holds the prey, the net or trap is used to capture it for the kill. From this point, the words move on to say that the table will become "a stumbling block" and a "recompense." The stumbling block is what one trips over. It is the sin that ends in ruin. Citing this indicates that the sin of rejecting Christ will first snare and entrap them and this

will lead to their downfall. And in this downfall is found their "recompense" which is their just retribution.

The sequence of these words is logical, one following the other to show the inevitable result of rejecting Christ. In a lesser way, it is the natural course of any sin. If one steals, the very thing they thought would enrich them first becomes a snare; they are lured in and held fast. Then they are hunted and trapped because of their action. What they had hoped would be for their benefit is what caused them to fall, and the result of their fall is arrest and imprisonment. If this is the natural course for sin, how stern must be the ultimate sin of rejecting God's offering of His Son?

Life application: Sin bears consequences - for our life, our health, our peace, our family, our future. Of all sin, the rejection of Jesus is one that, if not corrected before death, will lead to the punishment of every other sin and eternal condemnation. This message needs to be explained, sometimes more than once, to those around us. There is pardon of all sin in Christ; there is the eternal punishment of all sin without Christ.