

# Romans

## Chapter 11

### I. The Place of Israel in the New Covenant - Part 3

#### D. The Future Restoration of Israel - Romans 11:1-36

In Romans chapter 9 we find Paul dealing with the question of Israel's unbelief. In that chapter he shows that the general unbelief of the nation of Israel does not violate God's promises, person, plan, or prerequisites for salvation. In Romans chapter 10, Paul continues to give the flip side of Israel's rejection by showing that Israel's rejection of the Messiah was based on an ignorance of God's righteousness, the provision of Christ, the place of faith, the elements of salvation, and the prophecies of scripture. Romans 9 gives the side of God's sovereignty, Romans 10 gives the side of human responsibility. Now in Romans 11, Paul concludes his discussion of the place of Israel in the New Covenant by showing that the setting aside of Israel is partial in verses 1-10, and it is temporary in verses 11-29. In verses 30-36 we find Paul's closing remarks to the doctrinal section of Romans.

#### 1. The Setting Aside of Israel is Partial - Romans 11:1-10

The first point Paul makes about the setting aside of Israel is that it is partial. In other words, God has not set aside every Jew from the nation of Israel. Although the majority of the nation of Israel rejected their Messiah, there has always been, and always will be, a remnant of believing Jews.

Not everyone, however, holds this view. Covenant theology asserts that because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah, they have forever forfeited God's promises to them. The promises that God made to Israel have been transferred to the Church. In fact, if one will read the chapter headings in most Bibles, they will find the church mentioned all through the Old Testament prophetic books, particularly Isaiah. The interesting thing about this view is that covenant theology accepts all of the promises, but rejects all of the curses. If covenant theology were true, then the Church would be the recipient of not only the blessings of Israel, but the curses as well.

Covenant theology, however, must completely reinterpret several key passages in the Bible including this one. The message of Romans 11 is that God is not through with the nation of Israel but has only temporarily set them aside. Someday Israel will be restored to the place of blessing and will receive all of the promises given to them in the Old Testament.

Before Paul begins his discussion of the future of Israel, he shows that the current state of unbelief is only partial. He does this by revealing three proofs that the blinding of Israel is partial: 1) himself, 2) Elijah, and 3) God's election.

a. **Proof Number One that the Blinding of Israel is Partial - Romans 11:1**

**11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.**

The first proof offered by Paul that the blinding of Israel is partial is himself. We must remember that Paul was a Jew. In fact, before his conversion he was probably one of the most devout Jews of the day. His personal testimony to his Jewishness is found in Philippians 3:5-6:

**Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews: as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.**

Paul's proof is this. If the setting aside of Israel is permanent and total, then I too must be set aside because I am a Jew. If I have not been set aside, then it is reasonable to assume that not every Jew has been cut off from God as well. In other words, if all Israel has been blinded then Paul must be blind as well. Since he is not, the blinding of Israel is only partial.

b. **Proof Number Two that the Blinding of Israel is Partial - Romans 11:2-4**

**11:2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 11:3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 11:4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.**

The second proof offered by Paul in showing that the blindness of Israel is partial is that of Elijah.

If we read 1 Kings 18 and 19, we find the story of Elijah confronting the prophets of Baal. When we read the history of the Jewish people prior to the captivity, we find them chasing one false god after another. It seems their entire history is one of idolatry with only brief periods of revival. Probably the worst time of idolatry for the northern kingdom of Israel was under the reigns of Omri and his son Ahab. When we look at the secular history of this time, Omri and Ahab's reigns boasted of great economic prosperity, but inwardly there was deep spiritual bankruptcy.

To solidify his trade connections, Ahab married a woman from Phoenicia named Jezebel who happened to be a priestess of Baal. Through her, the entire northern kingdom of Israel plunged into gross idolatry. It was at this time that God raised up Elijah as his prophet and spokesman. In 1 Kings 18 we find Elijah confronting the priests of Baal and Ashtaroath (Baal's consort). In an overwhelming victory for God on Mount Carmel (modern Bierut), he killed 850 false prophets

and started a revival in Israel. Jezebel, angered at Elijah, promised to have him apprehended and killed within a day. After standing up to 850 false prophets, Elijah succumbed to one woman and fled for his life to the desert. Totally disillusioned and discouraged, he sat down under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life. Instead of immediately confronting Elijah, God sent an angel to care for him. After eating, Elijah journeyed to Mount Horeb where he sat down in a cave. In 1 Kings 19:10 we find his lament:

**And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.**

It is at this point that God finally speaks. In 1 Kings 19:17-18 we find God's answer:

**And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.**

The point that Paul makes by referring to Elijah is that God always has a faithful remnant. Even in the midst of some of the darkest days in Jewish history, God had seven thousand men who stayed true to him and his covenant. If God can have a remnant in the days of Elijah, he can surely have a remnant in the day's of Paul.

**c. Proof Number Three that the Blinding of Israel is Partial - Romans 11:5-10**

**11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 11:6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded 11:8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. 11:9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: 11:10 Let their eyes be darkened that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.**

Paul's third proof of the fact that the blinding of Israel is partial is the issue of God's election. Paul says that God has only chosen some of Israel to be objects of mercy while the majority of Israel become objects of God's wrath.

This is a very difficult concept for us to reconcile. We are so used to seeing things from our finite perspective that our first reaction to this proof is one of disbelief. We somehow feel that God is unfair in

selecting some people and passing over others. As we have pointed out in our discussion of Romans chapter 9, the Bible clearly teaches God is sovereign in his actions. We as his creation have no right to question his selection and purposes. However, just as the Bible is clear on this issue of divine sovereignty, it is also clear on the fact of our responsibility to respond in a positive way to God. Any man whom God rejects will reject God as well. We cannot fully understand this, but we must accept it since both sides are taught in scripture.

Paul's point is made clear in verse 5, **"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace."** Just as there was a remnant of seven thousand faithful Israelites in the time of Elijah, so there is a remnant of faithful Jews in the time of Paul. The Doctrine of the Remnant is interesting when studied throughout the Bible. Basically, the Doctrine of the Remnant asserts that at any point in history, only a small percentage of men know God. However, as small as this percentage might be, God always has a people of his own that he has elected to receive his divine favor by grace.

To further solidify the factor of grace in this selection, Paul write a very definitive statement regarding the relationship between works and grace in verse 6, **"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."** Basically this verse is stating that it is not possible to mix works and grace. Either we are elected according to God's sovereign grace apart from any effort on our part, or we are elected according to our works without any action from God. This is the central truth of justification by faith. To add any element of works, however small, is to destroy the grace of God. God sovereignly chooses men to salvation regardless of works. However, those who are chosen to salvation will live a life that exhibits good works as a result and not a cause of justification. Grace and law do not mix in the least.

Having put forth the idea of God's sovereign election, Paul now sums up the matter and adds the side of human responsibility to the equation. This is a masterful example by the Holy Spirit of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in their natural balance. In verse 7 we see God's sovereignty at work, **"What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded"**. Israel did not obtain the righteousness for which they sought (see Romans 10:3). However, all those that were sovereignly elected by God have received it (grace) while the rest were blinded. This verse is a very clear statement regarding God's election.

However, in verses 8 through 10 we see the true cause of the blindness, that being willful rejection of God. Verse 8 is a reference to Isaiah 29:10 in which God pronounces judgment on Israel because of their continued rejection of his message and messengers. One of the clear truths of scripture is that God's offer of grace does not exist forever. There comes a time when grace is withdrawn and judgment is pronounced. It is possible to reject God for so long that God will judicially blind those rejecting him so that they cannot believe. In

Luke 19:42 we find our Lord lamenting the rejection of Israel with these words, **“If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”** Jesus sorrowed over the rejection of Israel knowing that because of their rejection God had judicially blinded their eyes to the truth. Paul’s quote of Isaiah shows that blindness is a result of rejection, and is not God’s desire.

Verse 9 and 10 is another quote taken from the Old Testament. We find these two verses in Psalms 69:22-23. Psalms 69 is one of the Messianic psalms in which we are given previews of the coming Messiah. In verse 21 of this psalm, we find a prophecy regarding the vinegar given to Christ on the cross. When this psalm is analyzed, we see that the imprecations given by the speaker (Christ) is as a result of his rejection and suffering at the hands of his enemies. In other words, this psalm contains a reference to the judicial blinding of Israel as a consequence of their rejection of the Messiah. This agrees with our assertion that God never rejects someone who does not reject him as well.

## 2. **The Blinding of Israel is Temporary - Romans 11:11-29**

Having shown that the blindness of Israel is only partial, Paul now turns to his second point, that being the temporary nature of Israel’s blindness. In Romans 11:11-26 he gives the purpose of Israel’s temporary blindness, a warning regarding Israel’s temporary blindness, and the promise of the end of Israel’s temporary blindness.

### a. **The Purpose of Israel’s Temporary Blindness - Romans 11:11-15**

**11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. 11:12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. 11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?**

The first point Paul makes in explaining the temporary nature of the blindness of Israel is it’s purpose. In these five verses we see three distinct purposes presented: 1) Gentile salvation, 2) Jewish jealousy, and 3) world blessing.

#### 1). **Purpose Number One - Gentile Salvation - Romans 11:11**

When God chose the nation of Israel as his people, he desired that they be the vehicle through which his nature was to be made manifest to the world. God never chose Israel so that they would become an exclusive nation. This single issue is the major reason for the failure of Israel and God’s subsequent judgment.

When we look at the Old Testament, and examine the mindset of the rabbis of Jesus' day, we find that the Jews had made themselves exclusive recipients of God's favor and salvation. For a Jew to consider a Gentile as being under God's blessing was unthinkable.

Because the Jew had neglected to fulfill their purpose, God allowed them to fall in order that he might be made manifest to the Gentiles. Verse 11 is an interesting verse to look at since the word "fall" actually comes from two different Greek words with two different meanings. The first occurrence of "fall" comes from the Greek word *pesosin* and carries the idea of permanency. The second occurrence of "fall" is the Greek word *paraptoma* which has the idea of stumble. Therefore, what Paul is actually saying is "Has Israel stumbled never to rise again? God forbid: but rather through their temporary fall salvation is come to the Gentiles". Paul takes care to make the distinction between what is perceived to be a permanent fall with what is actually a temporary stumbling.

**2). Purpose Number Two - Israel's Jealousy - Romans 11:11,14**

The second purpose for Israel's temporary blindness is that they would be provoked to jealousy by the idea that Gentiles were getting in on God's favor. The exclusive attitude of Israel regarding the favor and salvation of God had so entrapped them that the mere idea of Gentiles being blessed by God was unthinkable. By temporarily setting Israel aside, God desires that they become jealous and as a result of that jealousy repent of their sin. Paul has already put forth this argument at the end of chapter 10 when he quotes Deuteronomy 32:21 in verse 19. Paul's desire, as stated in 11:14, is that his message would provoke the Jew to jealousy so that they would desire restoration to the place of blessing before God and as a result be saved.

**3). Purpose Number Three - World Blessing - Romans 11:12, 15**

The third and final reason for Israel's temporary blindness is that of anticipated world blessing. We currently live in a world under the dominion of sin. In fact, we have already seen that the whole creation longs for the manifestation of the sons of God so that it can be freed from the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:19-21). By the same token Paul states that the restoration of the Jew will result in world blessing beyond description.

In verse 12 we find Paul's argument in this regard following the argument from the lesser to the greater. This is a favorite method of argument that Paul uses time and time again. In verse 12a and 15a he states the lesser arguments, "the fall (Greek *paraptoma*) of the Jew is the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentile", and "the casting away of them the reconciling of the world". These are fantastic truths! The setting aside of Israel has opened God's favor to the

whole world. But, this is nothing compared to the greater arguments mentioned in 12b and 15b, “how much more their fullness”, and “life from the dead”. The future restoration of the nation of Israel will bring unparalleled blessing to the Gentiles just like the manifestation of the sons of God will bring back the paradise man lost in the garden.

**b. The Warning Regarding Israel’s Temporary Blindness - Romans 11:16-25a**

**11:16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy : and if the root be holy, so are the branches. 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. 11:19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. 11:20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: 11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. 11:23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. 11:24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches , be grafted into their own olive tree? 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.**

Paul, having shown that the temporary blindness of Israel’s has a definite purpose which results in the salvation of the Gentile, now turns to the Gentile and gives them a warning. The natural response of the Gentile at this point is one of pride. They would take special pride in the fact of their salvation and the fact the God had set Israel aside in order to show favor to them. Paul wants to make it very clear that the setting aside of Israel and the salvation of the Gentile does not give the Gentile license to fall into the same trap the Jews did, namely the trap of thinking that they were the exclusive holders of God’s blessing and salvation.

Paul attacks the possibility of Gentile bigotry regarding the Jew by using a simple analogy common to the readers of the book of Romans, namely the olive tree. Olive trees were common to Israel and had very long lives. In fact, if one visits the holy land, today one could see olive trees that were alive in the time of our Lord. Although olive trees lived a long time, their fruitfulness would diminish with age. As a result, an old olive tree would have it’s non-producing limbs cut off and have new fruitbearing limbs grafted in. This would prolong the fruitful life of the olive tree many more years.

Paul begins his warning regarding Gentile bigotry in verse 16 by pointing out that although the Jewish people as a nation have been cut off from God's blessing, they are still God's chosen people. Specifically, the verse is saying that because of God's blessing on the firstfruit and root, that is, on Abraham and his seed, God's blessing still rests on the remainder, that is, on the lump and the branches. In verses 17 and 18 Paul compares the natural branches, that is the unbelieving and fruitless Jews, with the grafted branches, believing Gentiles. Just as fruitless branches are cut off from the olive tree and replaced with fruitful branches, so the unbelieving Jews have been cut off from the olive tree and replaced with believing Gentiles. However, Paul makes a point in verse 18 that this should not be a source of boasting, but of gratefulness to God for grafting the Gentile in and gratefulness for the root of the tree. The source of blessing and life is the Jewish nation.

Paul next solidifies his warning to those Gentiles who would take pride in the fact of their belief in God and the unbelief of the Jew by making the point that if God removed the unbelieving branches that were fruitless, he surely will not spare the grafted branches that are fruitless. In other words, the fact of the Gentile being grafted into the tree is not to be a point of pride, but a point of fear realizing that we need to produce fruit. We must be careful, however, to understand this analogy in the context of its generic application. In other words, Paul is not talking about individuals but is talking about Jews and Gentiles as a group. The Jews, as a group, were cut off from the olive tree because of their unbelief and the Gentiles, as a group, were grafted in. Further, if the Gentiles, as a group, become fruitless, they will suffer the same fate as the Jew. Verses 22 and 23 make this very plain. God's severity fell on those branches that were fruitless. If the new branches continue in God's goodness, that is in his intended plan, they will remain. If not, they will be cut off just as quickly as the natural fruitless branches. However, if the Jew which had been cut off does not remain in unbelief, they will be grafted back in again and become partakers of God's grace. In fact, verse 24 states that God is even more ready to graft the believing Jew back into the olive tree than he was the Gentile.

Paul sums up the analogy of the olive tree by reinforcing the proper attitude we are to have as Gentiles. We are not to be wise in our own conceit, but realize that the current state of blessing on the Gentile is not something to be proud of, but something to be soberly seen as an act of God's grace.

c. **The Promise Regarding Israel's Temporary Blindness -  
Romans 11:25-29**

**11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 11:27 For this is my covenant**



**unto them, when I shall take away their sins. 11:28 As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.**

Paul finishes his treatise on the temporary blinding of Israel by revealing the promise of future restoration. Although God had set aside Israel as an act of judgment because of their unbelief, there is coming a day when the Jewish nation as a whole will be restored to the place of blessing prepared for them by God. That is the promise of the Old Testament, and the New Testament as well. We see four reasons for the restoration of Israel in these five verses, 1) the completion of the Church, 2) the promise of scripture, 3) the election of God, and 4) the irrevocability of God's promise and gifts.

### **1. The Completion of the Church - Romans 11:25**

Although a thorough discussion of the Church and its place in history is beyond the scope of our discussion as this point, we need to note the fact that the blindness of Israel will continue until God's church, the mystery hidden from ages past, is completed. Because of Israel's unbelief, they were set aside until a future time determined by God. Since God has always worked through a group of people, he has chosen to work through the Church, an elect people made up of all nationalities and backgrounds. This is the mystery alluded to by Paul in Ephesians 3:1-6. While God works through the Church, Israel will persist in a general state of unbelief. However, there is coming a future point at which the Church will be completed. Once completed, the Church is raptured out prior to the time of great tribulation immediately preceding Christ's second coming. At this point, God will once again return to dealing with the Jews as a nation and will refine them as gold is refined in a furnace. Upon his return to earth to establish his promised kingdom, one third of the nation of Israel will be redeemed and will see Christ for who he really is, the Messiah of Israel and the savior of mankind.

### **2. The Promise of Scripture - Romans 11:26-27**

Paul, as usual, refers to scripture to further support his argument of the future restoration of Israel. He does this in verse 26-27 by referring to several passages out of the Old Testament. Note the chart below: (Paul actually is quoting the Septuagint version of these verses hence the seeming discrepancies):

**"Out of Zion will come the Deliverer"**

**Isaiah 59:20 - And the Redeemer shall come to Zion and unto them that turn from the transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.**

<b>“and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob”</b>	<b>Isaiah 27:9 - By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.</b>
<b>“For this is my covenant unto them”</b>	<b>Isaiah 59:21 - As for me, this is my covenant with them...</b>
<b>“when I shall take away their sins”</b>	<b>Jer 31:31-34 - .. and I will remember their sin no more.</b>

The point Paul makes in his masterful blending of Old Testament passages under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, is that God promises a future restoration to Israel. (Note that Paul’s blending of these verses under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is allowed. However, we must avoid blending several verses together to support doctrine without consideration to the context of those verses).

There is coming a day when God will make a new covenant with Israel restoring them to the place of blessing that he originally intended them to occupy. This can be best summed up by a familiar passage quoted several times in the New Testament, Jeremiah 31:31-34:

**31:31 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 31:32 Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**

### **3. The Election of God - Romans 11:28**

The future restoration of Israel is further founded on God’s sovereign election. Just as God has chosen some to salvation and others to wrath, so has he purposed to restore Israel. Although the Jew was currently, in the time of Paul, the chief source of persecution for the Christians, they were still beloved by God and the fathers. God’s desire was that individual Jews respond to his offer of forgiveness, even though the nation as a whole was put aside.

#### 4. The Irrevocability of God's Promise and Gifts - Romans 11:29

Finally, Paul shows that the future restoration of Israel is predicated on the irrevocability of God's promises and gifts. Throughout the Old Testament, God promised future glory and blessing to the nation of Israel. A cursory reading of the book of Isaiah will reveal promise after promise of future glory and blessing. Since God cannot lie, and cannot go back on his promise, the future restoration of Israel is assured. To further quote Jeremiah 31, we read the following in verses 35-37:

**31:35 Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: 31:36 If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. 31:37 Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.**

## II. Conclusion to the Doctrinal Section of Romans - Romans 11:30-36

Paul has just finished over 11 chapters of doctrine. He has started this journey by showing that all men are under God's divine judgment in Romans 1:16 through 3:20. He next develops the doctrine of justification by showing 1) God has always justified men by faith in Romans 3:21-4:25, 2) the present results of justification in Romans 5-7, 3) the future glory which shall be given to those redeemed in Romans 8, and 4) the place of the Jew in the times of the Gentiles in Romans 9-11. Having done all this, Paul now steps back and summarizes the whole and praises God for his unfathomable wisdom.

### A. Paul's Summary of Justification by Faith - Romans 11:30-32

**11:30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: 11:31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.**

These three verses sum up the entire doctrine of justification by faith as presented by Paul in the preceding 11 chapters. Specifically, we find the following distinct points:

1. In verse 30 we see that the Gentiles have obtained mercy through the unbelief of Israel. If we remember the state of the Gentile as described by Paul in Romans 1:18-2:16, we see that God has been very gracious in allowing the Gentiles to be partakers of salvation. However, we must always remember the warning of Romans 11:18 that God's mercy to us is not something to be proud of, but something to be grateful for, since if God did not spare the natural branches, he will surely not spare us.
2. In verse 31 we see the roles reversed between the Gentile and the Jew during the Church age. The Jew, who is currently in a state of unbelief, are to

obtain mercy by the Gentiles in presenting the message of salvation to them. It is sad to realize that for many years this was not the case. Instead of the Gentile being the vehicle through which the message of salvation was to be given to the Jew, they became the exterminators and hoarders of that truth.

3. Verse 32 sums up the message of justification by faith. The word translated “concluded” is the Greek word *sunekleisen* which means “to shut up in prison”. God has imprisoned all of mankind in disobedience (not unbelief, Greek *apeitho*) so that he might show mercy upon them. Instead of God being unfair in giving special attention to some men, he has reduced all of them to the state of utter sinfulness and despair. Although it is true that some men have more of an opportunity to know God than others, all stand condemned equally before God.

#### B. God’s Unfathomable Wisdom - Romans 11:33-36

**11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! 11:34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? 11:35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.**

These four verses bring us to the limit of our understanding and comprehension. Paul describes the doctrine of justification by faith as being something beyond human understanding when examined in all of its fullness. We may be able to comprehend bits and pieces, but the knowledge of the whole is beyond our abilities. This is where the difference between the creator, and the created, is most evident.

Verse 33 is an exclamation of wonder and awe. Paul is asking how anyone can fathom the mind of God in all of his grand and glorious design. We do not like to be confronted with unanswerable questions, however, when we are asked to comprehend the mind of the creator we find many mysteries. For example, the scripture clearly teaches that God is one, however, it also teaches that God exists as Father, Son, and Spirit. How God can be one and three is a mystery. The Bible clearly teaches that God chose us to salvation before the world began, however it also teaches that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How God can chose and yet leave the invitation open to all is a mystery. We need to be aware that we will find many mysteries when trying to understand the creator, and we must be willing to let some of these mysteries exist in their disparate form. Instead of trying to comprehend the incomprehensible, we need to let these paradoxes exist and accept the truthfulness of them by faith. Someday we may understand, but for now we are to walk by faith.

To further lend credence to his argument, Paul asks three questions all of which have the implied answer of “no one”. The first is “Who hath known the mind of the Lord?”. Does anyone understand the mind of God? Of course not! We cannot understand the mind of God anymore than an ant can understand our mind. The second is “Who has been God’s counsellor?”. Who gave God counsel regarding anything he did? Who told God how to create the world, how to redeem man, who to show mercy to and who to show wrath to, or who gave God help in handling any crisis? No one! Lastly in verse 35, “Who gave something to God so that he owes that person a favor?”. The answer is no one! We need to understand

once and for all that God owes us nothing! These hucksters of the gospel that want us to believe we can twist the arm of God to get things have missed the whole message of the Bible. God is under obligation to no one. Salvation is a free gift given to those whom God chose before the foundation of the world. Life is a gift from God given, and taken at his pleasure. Although God has made promises to us, we did not force him to. We have no right to walk into the presence of God and demand a thing, we can only beg for mercy.

Verse 36 gives the reason, everything that exists does so to glorify God. Only when we submit ourselves to God and allow him to use us for the purpose we were created for, do we find the fulfillment and happiness all of mankind is searching for. We exist to display the attributes of God. Some of us display his attribute of mercy, love, grace, and forgiveness. Others display his attributes of wrath and justice. Creation exists to point to the creator. All that is exists so that God may reveal his divine attributes. This is the message of the Bible, this is the reason for salvation.