



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 11:28-32

"Calling Immutable and

Mercy Inexhaustible"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The general theme of our series of messages is, "The Apostle Paul and the Purpose of the Ages" or to put it in popular terms, "What is God Doing Now?" This, the sixth in our series of seven messages is entitled "Calling Immutable and Mercy Inexhaustible." I hope ya'll have your Bibles before you and turn in them to Romans 11:28-32, you'll understand and profit from the message much more if you do this.

We turn now to Romans 11 verse 28 through verse 32 and calling immutable and mercy inexhaustible. The knowledge of the divine purpose is an absolute essential for the reading the understanding and the living of Scripture. In most endeavors of life the knowledge of the proper or best plan of action is a necessity. No General would think of approaching a battle without a battle plan. No athletic coach would think of beginning a contest without a game plan. No teacher should come to a class session without a lesson plan. It's reasonable and true to scripture to expect God would have a plan in accomplishing his purpose, the greatest of all plans. The Bible states he has such a plan.

In Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 11 Paul in his marvelous words to the Ephesians about God's purpose through him to bring the good news to the Gentiles refers to the eternal purpose. Literally the expression is the purpose of the ages, which he purposed

in Christ Jesus our Lord. The divine purpose like any real world view has its beginning in creation, its stages of unfolding in the developing history of the Old and New Testaments, and a climactic conclusion in the future. No biblical writer has unfolded all the details of the plan of the ages in his work. Rather many authors have each made contribution in their several works that is true of Paul of course and Romans 11 may be his concentrated contribution to the subject. His particular stress lies in the light thrown on the relation of the nation Israel to the Gentile nations. And we've been seeking to elucidate that contribution in these series of messages on the eleventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

This study concentrates attention on verses 28 through 32. The key words in the chapter, now, become, gifts, calling, and mercy. The word mercy is found four times in this brief section and perhaps a word about its sense will help aid in the exposition of the verses. The verb means to have compassion to be sorry for to show compassion to be merciful. The derived noun *eleemosyna* referred to the act of kindness that followed compassion and then to alms or a contribution to the poor. We speak in English of eleemosynary institutes such as the United Fund, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the American Cancer Society. Thus the ideal of living from others came to be associated with the ideal of mercy.

A story told by Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse illustrated its sense for him. "My research assistant," Dr. Barnhouse wrote, "told me the following incident which illustrates clearly our Greek word for mercy. When he was pastor of a church in Metropolitan New York he had a Scottish lady come in to take care of the Mass for him. She always brought the children for lunch since the school was just across the street from the parsonage. Without fail after grace was said she would say eat up it's on the pastor we don't have to pay for it today. This expression of course was just an evidence of a Scotsman's thrift. On one of these occasions my assistant," Dr Barnhouse said, "said to the woman you know when you say eat up it's on the pastor we do not have to pay for it today you make

me think of a verse of scripture from the epistle to the Ephesians and the verse is 'but God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, chapter 2 and verse 4,' he said. Because of his mercy we can say eat up it's on the Lord we don't have to pay for it today."

To make it easy to distinguish mercy from grace we might speak of the difference in this simple way, grace is for the guilty while mercy is for the miserable; grace is for the guilty while mercy is for the miserable. Both of course, are for sinners.

Now, let's turn to Romans 11 verse 28 and 29 the apostle writes: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

Now, here we have Israel's inevitable future and in the first verse the twenty-eighth the apostle declares it plainly. Paul has concluded his argument for the future of ethnic Israel at this point he has said, and so all Israel shall be saved in the twenty-sixth verse he has argued the point very well he has contended that the falling away of Israel has reached it's climax and the rejection of the Messiah had as it's ultimate purpose Gentile salvation. Further, the present opening of the door to the Gentiles had at its goal Jewish jealousy and consequent reception into God's favor, which in turn would lead to a broader worldwide salvation of the Gentiles. And one may review that in verses 11 through 15.

The parable of the olive tree illustrated the matter; verse 16 through verse 24 and the quotations from scripture seal the evidence for Israel's return to covenantal blessings. This whole scheme of things naturally raise the question of the broad plan of God or the purpose of the ages as that purpose affects the nation Israel and the Gentile nations.

Thus Paul now obliges his readers in Rome by surveying the broad sweep of God's dealings with the nations the result is Paul's greatest passage of God's plan of the ages and we look into it now. One notices immediately in the original text the absence of the customary connecting conjunction or phrase. A practice very near and dear to anyone

writing Greek, that's not often seen in the English text and it's not very clear in the authorize version where we have simply as concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake. But you will notice there is no, for this reason or for or on account of this or then a connective like that. The Greeks habitually joined their sentences with such connectives for they generally liked the logical flow in their argumentation.

When the connectives were missing, more than likely there was a reason, such as, strong feeling or an abrupt change of direction of their theme. In the present case in light of the apostles personal concern with the theme of these chapters it's probable that his merit comments he writes with care as well as feeling and his words must be carefully marked. Well, we shall pay careful attention to them.

Verses 28 through 32 another commentator says, "Draw out and sum up the implications of the preceding verses." The older but excellent commentator, William G. T. Shedd, says that, "The verses recapitulate what has been said in verse 11 through verse 27, but with a broader sweep. Plainly stated, what Paul has been saying is this Israel has been cast away but Israel awaits a restoration."

The section that we're looking at verse 28 through verse 32 bears all the signs of careful writing on the apostle's part and I believe that one commentator has noted this so well that I'm going to repeat what he has said, "The paragraph has brought to an end with two balanced sentences each constructed on the same pattern. Each contains a pair of opposing or antithetical clauses followed by an explanatory for clause. Notice verse 28: "Enemies for your advantage." Paul says, Israel is but then he says, "They are beloved on account of the Father's sake." And he explains with his for clause in verse 29: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." And then in verse 30 he goes through the same procedure with clause a little bit longer. In verse 30:

"For as ye in times past has not believed God yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief, even so have these or they also now not believe that through your

mercy they also may obtain mercy. For (verse 32 explains again) for God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all."

[Message] As I mentioned a moment ago Israel's inevitable future is set before the reader in words in verse 28. Notice the words, "As concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake but as touching the election they are beloved for the Father's sake." The immutability of the divine choice is declared.

"In what since," one might ask, "are Israelites enemies now? Probably the word is used passively that is they are enemies in the since that at the present they are under the divine wrath treated as enemies. The parallelism of the verse indicates this: This enmity however, is for your sakes, that is for the sake of the Gentiles to whom Paul is writing and he's speaking of the providential dealing of God in which they are entering into the mercy of God through the unbelief of the nation Israel as a whole. But while the mass of the nation at present is under his wrath the divine election of Israel still holds. There is a remnant according to the election of grace and as Paul has just said above, "And so all Israel shall be saved."

The words election here, beloved on account of the Father's sake and then as concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake; as touching the election they are beloved for the Father's sake. That term election refers to the covenant promises as the following phrase "of the Fathers" indicates. The promises you'll find their fulfillment in the national restoration of the nation as a whole in the future and needless to say the promises are secured to Israel not on the ground of merit but solely on the ground of God's fidelity to his word and grace. No one ever receives the grace of God by merit. The Bible from the beginning of it to the end of it says the just shall live by faith and as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of your selves it is the gift of God not of works lest anyone should boast."

Now, Paul in verse 29 justifies that inevitable future. Notice the "for" that introduces the ground of Israel's status, namely the immutability of the divine gifts and calling. The words, "without repentance" for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Those words which mean literally "unregrettable" and are emphatic in the original text, stress the unchangeability of the Abrahamic promises they are unregrettable simply because they are irrevocable. The gifts are the effects of the call representing the individual promises. And the calling represents the particular act of election, that's the cause of the gifts.

Rabbi Finkelstein in the *Time* article I sited in a previous study in the context of military service put it this way, "The choosing of God was like selective service it's binding on all Jews to the last generation on earth." Well, that needs some explanation, of course, the apostle doesn't deny that when a Jewish man, just as a Gentile man does not respond to the word of God he is a lost man, but Israel has this great promise of a national future and that is an invaluable and an immutable future, which they will enjoy.

The apostle in verse 30 begins his discussion of mercy inexhaustible and first he declares it in verses 30 and 31. This final balanced sentence is a kind of reiteration and confirmation of verses 11 and 27, the for introduces an explanation and an expansion of the argument and Paul points out that at the end of the road for both Jew and Gentile is God's mercy and for each of them the road leads to it through disobedience. Notice how he puts it, "For as ye in times past have not believed in God yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief (he's talking to the Gentiles, now, he turns and says) even so have these also now not believed that through your mercy they may also obtain mercy."

So the story of Gentile disobedience in verse 30 comes first. The apostle doesn't expand on the details of the period of their disobedience and we can only survey the scriptures of the Old Testament for some inkling of his thinking. One would think that the apostle probably has in mind the original fall of man in the Garden of Eden and the consequent fallen condition that has prevailed to the present. While God called Abraham

out of fallen mankind and began a new work with him and his seed the Gentiles remained in their disobedient state. This diagnosis finds confirmation in the way the apostle describes the Gentile condition in chapter 1 verse 18 through verse 32 where he speaks about their disobedience and three times comments upon how God has given them over to judgment.

One commentator sees the divine will working out his plan in this. "In each case," Barrett writes, "behind disobedience and mercy God wills and enacts the one, as he wills enacts the other." The Jewish history follows in verse 31 and the apostle finds a similarity in the comparison of them in the present age with the Gentiles in the past age. They too, although still an elect people, have fallen into disobedience. Climaxing in the rejection of the Messiah but continuing still in the present age. The period of time covered is from Genesis twelve up to the present age.

The apostle repeats the scheme of things in the last clause that he's been emphasizing in the earlier verses the purpose of Gentile salvation is that because of the mercy shown to you, that is you Gentiles, Israel may eventually be restored.

Now, in the last clause there is a noun which is not really here in the Authorized Version, text but is found in the original text, most likely. The manuscripts differ. Some having the adverb, other's not having it and still others have "later", the adverb "later". Some Arminianists found the noun to be like a line thrown to a drowning man, their last hope in affirming that Israel's salvation is taking place in the salvation of the remnants through the ages or now at the present day.

The text or question I discuss in the paper, which you may get if you write in to the Chapel. But I take the "now" to be probably genuine, although, early and wide spread witnesses favor it's omission. What is it mean then to say that "Now, mercy may be shown to them?" Well, simply that Israel will find their mercy in the present Messianic age and as the scriptures point out it will be in the concluding scenes that climax with the Second Advent.

Paul then has in mind a divine purpose of the ages from man's disobedience at the fall through divine election of Abraham and his seed. That divinely elected nation, however, stumbled over the stumbling stone the Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ, leading to the opening of the door of salvation to elected Gentiles. They too the New Testament scriptures say shall conclude their time of divine blessing in apostasy and Israel made jealous delivered and blessed shall be restored to her favorite place before God.

As an issue of their startling return to the Lord their witness to the nation shall finally culminate in the worldwide blessing of the Gentiles, mercy to all is the glorious divine purpose, and Paul speaks of it's justification in verse 32. He writes: "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." The for of verse 32 confirms and explains the sentiments of verse 30 and 31, "God will have concluded all, both Jews and Gentiles under sin and disobedience with the purpose of showing mercy to all." The word translated by "hath concluded" is a very vivid word, used in military context for the giving of people over to the sword, metaphorically for the catching of fish in Luke chapter 5 and verse 6. It was used to prisoners in prison and Arthur Way uses the text here, "God shut the door on them all when they passed into prison cell of disobedience only with the intention of having mercy on all."

"But conviction is in order to conversion," Shed points out, and that's the case here. The clause contains two occurrences of the noun "all". Notice for God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy on them all; and these "alls" have been misunderstood by a few interpreters. Some have even sought to find in the text support for Universalism, the doctrine that all without exception shall be saved ultimately. A teaching foolishly and immorally embraced by certain of the cults and now quite popular in some main line churches. Other such as the Armenians and quite a few of the Calmenians, my unhistorical designation of those who've tried to combine two irreconcilable systems of theology, Calvinism and Armenism have taught that God purposed to save all without exception but man's will defeated it's purpose. That view is

not only contradicted by statements made by Paul in Romans 8:29-30, Romans 9:16, Romans 9:18 and 9:21, but leaves us with a limited deity a frustratable God. He then becomes one of whom it cannot be said as the prophets did say, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all of my pleasure." Look if you have time at Isaiah 46:10, Isaiah 44:28 and Daniel 4:35 and you will see that the God of the heavens is a God who cannot be frustrated in the fulfillment and consummation and accomplishment of all his promised word.

Know the problem really has a simple solution. Paul as often in the Bible uses the term in the sense of "all" without distinction not "all" without exception. That becomes clear when we remember that the chapter has to do with the nations, Israel and the Gentiles. At this place Paul means God will have mercy on all that is all the nations, both Israel and the Gentiles.

One commentator like many has difficulty with the word because he takes the first "all" to mean "all without exception" a true teaching of course in other context for without exception all are under sin. And then of course, he has difficulty in giving "all" a different sense in the last clause. He's concluded them all he says, "Everyone, every single individual in unbelief that he might have mercy on every single individual?" No he finds he cannot believe that so he finally winds up with what he calls the view of, Karl Bart, the famous Swiss theologian. Namely, that the text does not teach Universalism nor does it teach the exclusion of some from the embrace of God's mercy but patently inconsistent position. How can you say the text does not teach Universalism but at the same time it doesn't teach that they're any who are not within the embrace of God's mercy?

Oscar Wilde once said, "Consistency is the last refuge of the un imaginative." And Ralph Waldo Emerson offered this, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen's and philosophers and divines." Well, I guess he would be talking about me when he says, "divines" because I have taught Christian theology. I still like consistency, however, and these men you'll have to smile as you noted had to use

consistency in order to say that they disliked it. If we are inconsistent in our speech we really cannot say anything that makes sense, everything then becomes nonsense.

So let me conclude. Paul then affirms in his magnificent survey of God's plan of the ages that it shall issue a universal mercy to Israel and the Gentiles and all the individuals who respond to God's loving offer shall have the testimony of John Allen of the Salvation Army, "I deserve to be damned, I deserve to be in Hell but God interfered." Other's who know the Lord say the same thing.

May I ask you a question today? Do you know him? Do you know him who has offered us mercy by virtue of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ? Who suffered under the judgment, divine judgment for the sins of sinners?

[Prayer] May God in his marvelous grace reveal to you your need of him and may in his marvelous effectual calling you too come to know him whom to know is life everlasting. That is our prayer for you and it's my prayer particularly that you make this decision now.

[Message] The final message of the series will be given at this time. Its entitled "The Leading Principle of All Divine Truth" and we'll finish Romans chapter 11 then, I hope you'll be listening.