

Something Begun But Not Yet Completed  
Romans 11:25–36

Jesus made one of many shocking statements in His Sermon on the Mount when he said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.”* Apparently at that time, God’s Word had been misinterpreted and twisted to fit an “us vs. them” way of thinking and living. Jews and Gentiles were against one another, and many Jews were against each other.

William Hendriksen looks closely at the circumstances into which Jesus spoke these words, and he notes that, *“It was into the midst of this intensely narrow-minded exclusivistic and intolerant environment that Jesus carried on His ministry.”* Does that sound familiar to you at all – *“intensely narrow-minded exclusivistic and intolerant environment?”* Doesn’t it sound a lot like the world we live in today?

People were very divided when Christ launched His earthly ministry. Hendriksen goes on to say, *“All around [Jesus] were...walls and fences. He came for the very purpose of bursting those barriers, so that love—pure, warm, divine, infinite—would be able to flow straight down from the heart of God.”*

Loving even your enemies, praying even for those who mistreat you: these things don’t feel right. They’re unnatural for sinners. Yet Jesus commands this.

Well, the gospel teaches us that not only did Jesus command these things, but He also did them for us and in our place. Romans 5 says, *“While we were enemies”* of God, Christ died for us. In Christ, God had mercy on His enemies. While on His cross, Jesus prayed for those who desired His death. And those who believe in Christ are able to do the same.

We can love and pray for our enemies. Christ and His gospel reshapes the human heart and mind. And as we learn from and understand and worship Christ more and more, we will begin to take on His outlook on the world. It’s the outlook we need as a church in order to obey and glorify God.

Now, we speak about the “person and work” of Jesus Christ: who He is and what He did. But His “work” also includes what He is now doing, and has yet to do. Christ did an amazing work through His life, death and resurrection, but He’s doing something even today, with more to come in the future. Christ is on mission. And to join Him on that mission, we must see the mission as He sees it.

Often among professing Christians, you will observe two wrong ways of seeing and responding to the sinful world and to the mission of Christ. One wrong response is to become like the world – to embrace the ways and beliefs of God’s enemies and to veer away from His moral law. The other wrong response is, you might say, on the other end of the spectrum.

Some choose to retreat from the world: to give up on them, despising and avoiding them, and even hiding from them. And yet Jesus, during His earthly ministry, did neither of these. What Jesus models for us and calls us to do is a different way, unlike both of these. He calls us to love the enemies of the church and pray for them – like Him, to stand firm on the truth and yet pursue and engage them. Jesus is doing a work among them even now, and He will continue to work among them.

But what is that work that Jesus will do? The end of Romans 11 discusses it. You can find an outline of these things for you on page 6. Christ is doing three things. He will draw (or bring in) the full number of elect Gentiles, He will draw the full number of elect Jews, and He will clarify the holy ways of the triune God. In other words, as we know Christ more, we will know and understand God and His mission more. So let's look at this together.

This is the end of an argument within an argument – an explanation within an explanation. The central theme of the book of Romans is the gospel. And within the case for why all people are sinners and God's mercy comes through Christ is the case for how this applies to the physical descendants of Abraham.

What about those Israelites (ethnic Jews) who rejected Jesus and continue to do so?

Paul says that he has *“great sorrow and unceasing anguish”* in his heart for them because if they don't believe in Jesus Christ, they won't be saved. He explains that this doesn't undermine God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whom God renamed “Israel”). In fact, Paul previously said, *“Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.”*

And this is not unjust of God. Salvation had always been by faith. Faith was necessary. Paul says, God *“has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.”* This is God's sovereign prerogative. But God is not uncaring. The gospel call goes out, and from all peoples of the earth, *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

And Paul says that no matter how bad things get on the earth, even when unbelief is widespread, God is always calling and preserving many who will trust and believe. We learned also in Romans 9-11 that there is only one people of God, which Paul describes like a tree – a tree of faith. It has “branches” of believers: ethnic Jew branches and Gentile branches. The Gentiles are grafted in and some Jews have been grafted back in.

To be included requires belief. All the way back in Romans 1, Paul says the gospel is the power of God for salvation *“to everyone who believes.”* And now we arrive at the conclusion of this argument within the argument.

Notice in verse [25] that Paul is explaining these things to this mostly Gentile church in order that they will not *“be wise in [their] own sight.”* What does this mean?

Well, by sight, they might conclude that there is no hope for the unbelieving Jews – those who were against them. Paul refers to what is going on as a “*mystery*.” Various places in the NT describe the plans of God as a mystery. But Charles Hodge points out that a biblical mystery is, “*Mysterious, not so much in the sense of incomprehensible,*” but rather, “*as in that of undiscoverable by human reason and a matter of divine revelation.*” So, these things are not naturally apparent to us. However, God has revealed that “*a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*” The full number of elect Gentiles.

You may or may not be familiar with the term “effectually calling.” It’s how theologians differentiate between all who hear the call to receive Christ outwardly and those who are made able by the Holy Spirit to respond to that call inwardly with saving faith. For those who actually trust in Jesus, the call will be effective.

The Jews were left in their unbelief – in their rejection of the Savior – and God opened the way for all people groups to come into the covenant of grace. This is still going on and will continue. Christ will draw the full number of elect Gentiles until He returns. And their future belief in Jesus is absolutely certain.

Have you ever taken some kind of risk with the hope of a reward? What made it a risk? It was that you didn’t know what the result would be. You could have failed. So perhaps you took a calculated risk. That way, even if you failed, you wouldn’t lose everything. But you might lose what you put at risk. That’s what makes it a risk: the uncertainty.

As we join Christ on mission, telling people about who He is and what He's done, we must understand that for those whom God has chosen to make it effective, His call will most certainly be effective. There’s no way for us to know who will or will not be effectually called by God. We shouldn’t even presume to know. But we can be confident knowing that Christ is drawing people and will continue to draw people. God has flung the door wide open for every nation, and we should pray for people and share Christ with anticipation. Because the future even of our enemies is not for us to know.

Is there someone who you would rather hate than pray for? Pray for them. Is there someone who you naturally want to write off? Seek instead to know what it means to love them? It may be that all you can do is pray for them. It may not be safe for you to even approach or interact with them. But pray.

Now, notice again in verse 25 that Paul says there is only a partial hardening on ethnic Israel. Not all Jews will reject Christ forever. In every generation, some will come to faith in Him. Look at verse [26] *And in this way all Israel will be saved.*

Even in the world of scholars whom I study and trust, there is some disagreement on exactly what Paul means by “all Israel.” We know for sure from what he says in Romans 9 that he doesn’t mean every single ethnic Jew. “All Israel” could mean Jews and Gentiles who are

saved, but it seems more likely in this context that he's referring to all the Jewish elect, to those descended from Abraham by birth who will receive the effectual call. This is something else Christ will continue to do until His return: Christ will draw the full number of elect Jews.

See the rest of the verse, "*as it is written.*" And this is a combination of several OT passages referring to the first coming of Christ: when He was humanly born and lived and ministered. "*The Deliverer will come from Zion (Jesus came as a Jew and first to the Jews), he will banish ungodliness from Jacob*" (and Jesus did save His people from ungodliness so they could have peace with the holy God.) Verse [27] "*and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.*" This describes justification by faith. It's right in line with the whole book of Romans.

So Paul is saying that there were many Jews still to be brought in. If you compare this with what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about loving your enemies, you realize that here the shoe is on the other foot. Now it is the Gentiles who must love and pray for those persecuting them for their faith. Look at verse [28], he says, "*As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake.*" So, the Jews were against these Gentiles for their faith in Jesus Christ. "*But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.*" In other words, these elect Jews would one day realize that Christ is the fulfillment of all the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God is not done with the Jews whom He plans to call. In fact, verse [29] "*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*" When God plans to call you, you will respond, and for those who come to faith in Him, you cannot lose that calling. It's all according to God's plan, verse [30] "*For just as you (the Gentiles) were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their (the Jews') disobedience, so they (the Jews) too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.*" Some will recognize God's grace on the Gentiles and they will want it too.

Verse [32] "*For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*" This is another example in Scripture where "all" does not refer to every single person who has ever lived. This doesn't mean all people without exception. It can't mean that. It means "*all who will be effectually called.*" Paul is not promoting universalism. This means "all" who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This gives us another good reason to love our enemies. Do you see the reason? It's that they may one day be our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Do you like to shop at the consignment stores at all? You can find some deals on good stuff! This is an interesting translation in verse 32. "*For God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all.*" The wording Paul uses here which we translate "consigned" describes a situation where a person would be shut up and made a prisoner. It's literally a circumstance where someone is turned over to someone else.

That's what consignment is: someone takes what belongs to them in the first place and then they deliver to someone else to be sold. All God has made – including the people – belongs to Him. God delivers sinners over to slavery under sin (which we naturally want) but for those

whom He graciously saves, we are only delivered to sin in order that He may deliver us from sin through faith in His Son. *“In order to,”* as Paul says back in Romans 9, *“make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy.”*

If you’ve trusted in Jesus, that’s what you are – a vessel of God’s mercy. Again, we don’t know who God plans to effectively call. A true Christian is someone who is just glad to be called – just thankful to be included, because you know it’s all grace. And we should be thankful for all that that God has made known to us.

Look with me at these last verses. This is widely known as a “doxology” Doxologies are expressions of praise that are used again and again. We see these in Scripture. This doxology that Paul composes here (by the power of God) is poetic and it’s an end cap on his chapters 9-11 argument. Why does he launch into this here?

Well, even with the wonderful explanation that he has given, even with the outstanding, God-given argument that he has made, even with the mystery of God that he has revealed, he knows there will be questions that only God can answer. And so he exclaims – with deep reverence – verse [33], *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!”*

In other words, you can’t study enough to know all that God knows. You can’t search enough to understand why He does everything He does. And you can’t trace out all of His ways or comprehend all of His purposes. We just can’t.

And here’s another combination of Scripture passages, verse [34] *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* [35] *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* Obviously, there’s none like God. No one teaches Him. No one is tapped into His every thought. And He’s the only creator of all things. He has no need for our gifts, and He owes us nothing.

He’s so different from us that some argue that God is “wholly other.” W-H-O-L-L-Y. Completely other. But if that were true, then how could we know God at all? How could we communicate with Him or know anything about Him?

We can’t fully comprehend God, but He is not completely beyond all human comprehension. You can know God more. You can understand Him more. Wouldn’t you like to? Wouldn’t you like to have a better sense of what He’s doing and what He expects from you?

There’s so much that we can understand, and Scripture tells us where to look. Colossians 2 says that in Jesus Christ, *“the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”* Jesus Christ *“is the image of the invisible God.”* Here’s one more thing Christ is doing even now and will continue to do: Christ will clarify the holy ways of the triune God.

To truly know God, you must know Christ. All the character and ways of God reach their pinnacle and are on full display in the person and work of Jesus. He stirs our hearts to worship, and as we discover more and more of God through Him, we too will exclaim the words of verse [36], *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

You may have noticed the clearing going on behind our buildings. Since we received this property, we've been taking steps of improvement and development. And after we did our initial renovation and then moved in, one of our leaders described the development as looking like "something begun but not yet complete." The work has begun, and a great change has occurred, but there's more left to do.

The mission of God in the world is like that, although far greater of course. Christ has come, and He is now at work in the world, affecting change as He draws people, transforming lives and clarifying who God is and what He's doing. But He has more left to do before He returns in glory.

This morning, we go to His table together for a ritual that He commanded. We celebrate what He has begun, what He has completed, and what He will most certainly finish. Have you begun this journey with Christ?

Humble yourself before Him today and believe in Him.

Let's bow together in prayer.