

Drawn to Christ
Romans 11:1–12

Do you ever find yourself having made an assumption about something or someone that later turned out to not be true? You misread a situation or a person. You observed circumstances and then came to conclusions that were actually false.

This is something that we all do. We do it even with God. The OT prophet Jeremiah wrote, *“Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am Yahweh.”*

We make many wrong assumptions about God because of a lack of understanding and knowledge.

In Romans 9-11, the apostle Paul addresses many wrong assumptions about God. For instance, this chapter begins with the question, *“Has God rejected His people?”* Many of the Jews had rejected Christ, so had God rejected those He promised to save?

What we learned in previous chapters is that, in fact, not all who descended from Israel by birth belonged to the true people of God. They weren't God's people simply because they descended from Abraham. Faith was required. They wrongly assumed salvation came by keeping God's laws. But no one can keep the law perfectly. Grace was required. We cannot earn salvation. But they, like all people, wrongly assumed that we must or that we can earn it.

Wrong assumptions lead to wrong conclusions, which lead to wrong actions.

Paul described their wrong actions. *“They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”*

But God doesn't base His actions on our assumptions about Him or His plans. He operates according to His eternal truth, according to His holy will and His wise judgments. And He reveals many of these things to us in the Scriptures.

We don't have to operate on false assumptions. We can rely on the truth of His Word. Here in Romans 11, the drawing of people to Jesus Christ is in view. This chapter answers a vital question for the church in every generation: What does the Word of God say about how a person is drawn to Christ?

And I say “drawn” because Jesus stated, *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* Romans 10 begins to broach the subject. Romans 11 goes further.

Notice the outline in the WG. Paul details how people are saved. God has a grace-based plan to do a heart-softening work through a faith-provoking ministry. Salvation is a God-centered endeavor. So let's take a closer look.

Paul starts by saying that he is proof that God has not rejected all of Israel. Look at verse 1, *"I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin."* In Philippians 3, Paul calls himself *"a Hebrew of Hebrews."* He had the pedigree.

Why were some Jews saved and others were not?

Verse [2], *"God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew."* While many rejected Christ and God's grace, many trusted in Christ. Paul was an example, even though early on, he had rejected Jesus; and what's more, he had persecuted Christians, even killing some in attempts to stamp out Christianity.

There was no indication at that time that Paul would ever believe in Jesus. But God foreknew Paul, choosing to have mercy on him rather than allowing him to be further hardened by sin. Paul had demonstrated that he did not deserve the mercy of God. He had been diametrically opposed to what God was doing. Paul foolishly believed he was defending the religion of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was zealous – but not according to knowledge.

Wrong assumptions, wrong conclusions, wrong actions.

Paul was attempting to establish his own righteousness before God by human effort. But then God opened his eyes, and Paul was added to those who had true faith. These people had always existed, even among all the unbelief. He gives the example of Elijah, the great OT prophet of God. Look again at verse 2, *"Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? [3] 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' [4] But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'"*

Baal was the false god of the Canaanites. Elijah feared that he was the only one left who desired to remain faithful to Yahweh. But God corrects him. He has *"kept"* for Himself 7000 men – presumably plus women and children (Scripture often describes groups in this way). Paul goes on, verse [5] *So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. [6] But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

Paul has already explained that it was never by works; it was always by grace. But if you have believed that acceptance from God comes by the doing of works, you should believe that no longer! And if you live your life that way, you should do so no longer!

Have you ever received a gift from someone that was unexpected, and you felt embarrassed that you had no gift to give them in return? You may have felt awkward, kind of vulnerable and

indebted. Of course, if you felt that you deserved the gift – that it was your right – then you wouldn't feel awkward.

God's free grace exposes so many of our wrong assumptions about God. He draws sinners to Christ according to nothing other than His grace-based plan. That alone is why there have always been and will always be until the end those who know the one true God by faith. They are those whom God foreknew and keeps for Himself unto salvation.

This is the bedrock on which we proclaim Christ with confidence. The message of Jesus is preached from this pulpit and taught in our various classes and groups and shared by each of you as the opportunity arises. And all of that is basically work (or labor). But – people are truly drawn – they are genuinely attracted to Jesus Christ for salvation in Him because God has a grace-based plan. We do not earn our way into His plan. We just call on Christ by faith, which we can do because God's plan is to do a heart-softening work. Look with me at this next section.

Verse [7] *What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,*” and Paul gives an example, a quote referencing Deuteronomy 29 and Isaiah 29. Verse [8] *as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”* These were people who wanted a god, but not the God of Abraham. They wanted the gods of the world. They yearned to place trust where the nations placed trust. And so God turned them over. He gave them what they wanted.

One thing to note here is that Paul's example comes from two different eras in Israelite history. Deuteronomy was given under Moses; Isaiah wrote his prophecy long after the death of David. But the theme is the same. And then Paul quotes David, to cover all three great periods of time. Verse [9] *And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.”* This is from Psalm 69. Verse [10] *let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”* This was David's prayer for God to deal justly with those who accused and persecuted him.

Psalm 69 is quoted many times in the NT in reference to Jesus Christ and his earthly ministry. This psalm foreshadows much of what Christ would endure and accomplish. David also talks about the table in his most famous psalm – Psalm 23. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* Have you heard that before? What does it mean? Well, it's ancient language alluding to a banquet in celebration of a victory.

Even in the presence of his enemies, David had victory by knowing and understanding God.

In Psalm 69, he describes how these evil enemies believe that they have won. They gloat about a perceived victory. And often, David's enemies were his fellow Israelites, and what they thought was a victory was actually their undoing. They rejected God's chosen king – their shepherd – and God gave them over to their rejection. They wanted to be hard-hearted, so God made it so.

Have you ever tried to bite something and you broke a tooth? You should only bite food that is softer than your teeth, right? Otherwise, when you bite it, your teeth will break. You wouldn't try to nail two boards together with a dry spaghetti noodle, would you? No, because a nail has to be harder than the thing it is piercing.

Hard-heartedness is another way to describe growing callous, becoming unable to care, and specifically with being unable to receive the truth. So when the truth comes, it bounces off. In every era, some were chosen by God to receive a gracious heart-softening. They were enabled to receive the truth. Not that they wanted it – it was by grace! But the rest were subject to the natural hardening that they wanted – that they pursued.

What made David different? We know that he had his moral failures. What made Moses or Isaiah different? It was God's grace. God softens the hearts of the elect, of those He foreknew.

Out of God's grace-based plan comes this heart-softening work that He does. Again, the message of Jesus is preached from this pulpit and taught in our various classes and groups, and shared by each of you as opportunity arises. And all of this is basically labor.

But heart-softening is God's work. Only God can do it. Remember: wrong assumptions, wrong conclusions, wrong actions. Only God can do it, and He does it according to His plan, for whom He planned. And yet...

And yet, the role of the church is important and necessary and decreed by God. These final verses express that. Paul explains that the rejection by so many Jews preceded salvation going out to every nation. He had a large role in this. In fact, in verse 13 he states that he was known as, "*an apostle to the Gentiles*" - basically to non-Jews.

But notice in verse 11 he says, "*through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.*" Normally, we don't think of jealousy as a good thing. But if you are jealous of something good – if you are provoked to desire something righteous, that is a good thing.

God used the salvation of the Gentiles to wake up more and more Jews to the true nature of salvation – and that was a wonderful thing. More Jews receiving Christ is the "*full inclusion*" – and perhaps an even clearer translation there might be "*fullness.*" The ultimate plan of God was Jews and Gentiles together – people from every nation of earth blessed through Abraham – salvation to every group.

And then Paul makes this interesting statement, verse [13] "*Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry [14] in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.*" Without a doubt, Paul understands that God has a grace-based plan, and that only God can do the heart-softening

work. But God uses the ministry of His people, and He uses a certain kind of ministry. It's a ministry that provokes people.

Imagine two children, maybe they are siblings or classmates, and then get in an argument of some kind. Maybe just words, or maybe it comes to blows. And when they're confronted by the adult in charge, one says, "*He provoked me!*" The child cries that he was made to do whatever he did. What he said or did was caused by what the other child said or did. Paul is telling us here that God works through a ministry that causes or compels people to desire the rich and free grace of God that they see and hear others enjoying.

Constantly over the past 20 or 30 years or so statistics have come out telling us that the evangelical church in America is in decline. Less people are going to church than ever before. Statistics can be misleading, but our nation is moving largely in a less-religious direction, and while churches are being planted, many are being closed. So I think there is something to the statistical claims.

But it's noteworthy, though, that this decline has coincided with the rise of what is commonly called the "megachurch." A megachurch is a huge church that functions like a large corporation. And in many of these churches, there's a heavy reliance on a big paid staff, and on the newest technology to make the environment more dazzling and the music more entertaining in order to get people in the doors and to keep their attention.

Now, get me wrong, we want to see people come in and pay attention. But it begs the question: to what degree have megachurches helped the cause of Christ in America, and to what degree have they hurt His cause?

I don't have all the answers. But I do know that the ministry God plans to use is one that provokes people to faith with the pure gospel of Jesus Christ that will save and sanctify them. Because that's what Paul had. People weren't being drawn to Christ with entertainment or fun or guidance for self-improvement.

Now, it makes sense that pastors and churches feel the need to add to Christ. The fear is that He is not enough. So there needs to be lots of age-appropriate programs. There needs to be a presentation that rivals a concert or a TED talk. And there needs to be a steady diet of life-coaching coming from the pulpit. But listen to me, please.

God's pulpit is for proclaiming the exhaustive sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to make you right with God and to transform and sanctify you through and through so that you increasingly live for and enjoy God's glory in the world. The mission of the church is to announce and to enjoy the rich and free grace of God in Christ as His person and work is proclaimed to you Lord's Day after Lord's Day. Just because people seem to have in mind what they want in a worship service or a church doesn't mean that's what we must give them.

I love a good concert. I love a good movie. I love a well-written and well-presented speech. But the worship and preaching of the church is none of those things. We don't have to act on our insecurities about what the world thinks.

Wrong assumptions, wrong conclusions, wrong actions.

And notice again in verse 13 that Paul says, "*I magnify my ministry.*" There was a certain reverence that he had to the ministry God gave him. He honored the calling given to him to proclaim the glory of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and he was criticized and questioned for it.

Some thought he should be compelling new Gentile believers to focus on keeping OT ceremonial laws. But that wouldn't make Jews jealous. Paul didn't teach Gentile believers the ins and outs of OT temple worship and sacrifice. That wouldn't make Jews jealous.

It's clear from the whole book of Romans that Paul understood that he must focus on the centerpiece of the ministry God had given him and glorify that centerpiece, and that as he did, many of his fellow Jews would be provoked to believe. God would do His heart-softening work according to His grace-based plan.

And what was that centerpiece of the ministry? It is a person: the Lord Jesus Christ. His humble birth, His perfect life, and sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. In John 12, Jesus said, "*I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*" I discovered a wonderful comment on this passage in the Reformation Study Bible, which I know some of you use and which I wholeheartedly recommend. The note says, "*The cross exerts a universal attraction, and people of all nationalities, Gentiles as well as Jews, will be saved through it.*"

What we win people with is what we win them to. We desire to win you only to Christ and only with Christ – to have a ministry here that exudes the wonderful and lavish grace of God, which he has poured out on miserable sinners, and the tremendous comfort of Christ and His gospel, so that you may be drawn to Christ.

Before we go to the Lord's table, let's bow together in prayer.