

Intro: When our kids were little and inevitably discipline was necessary for one of them, we had a couple of kids who reflexively enjoyed gloating over their sibling's punishment. "Ha! Ha!" And we would immediately turn to that gloating, smug child and bring correction to them, "You don't do that. You could easily be sitting here yourself. Just remember that. Now say you're sorry."

Paul has had a similar parenting moment with the Gentiles in the Roman Church.

Paul's whole line of thought is that the true, spiritual children of Abraham are the faithful minority, not the religious majority who've rejected Christ. The majority of ethnic Jews are currently in exile, in a state discipline, in the hopes that they will be regrafted back into the family of God—the Olive tree which is Christ.

God's mercy on the natural descendants of Abraham coincided with his judgment and wrath on the Gentiles. Now, his election and inclusion of the Gentiles in the family of God coincides with his judgment on ethnic Israel—which is a partial and temporary discipline.

And he's had to turn to the Gentiles and say, "Don't get too big for your britches. You don't gloat over your brother because this could very easily be (and was) *you* sitting here.

So now the question remains, "What do we make of the fact that God is sovereign in election and men are held responsible for believing in or rejecting Christ?"

Paul will close this topic by revealing two more things and then leaving the rest of up to being hidden in the mysterious and unsearchable wisdom and knowledge of God.

1. God's gracious gift of election is irrevocable. Rom 11:28 Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, ²⁹ since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.

- **In Paul's day, the Jews had become enemies of the gospel.**

They ***opposed Jesus' ministry*** to outcasts and outsiders. That's because they had become an insular, ingrown religious cult turning their story of faithful Abraham into a cold, complicated legalistic cult. And Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus came to set captives free and heal the lame and restore sight to the blind and forgive sins. Their response? They put him on trial and handed him over to the Romans to be crucified and killed for it.

They ***opposed Paul in the synagogues***. When the Gospel finally took hold among Gentiles in cities across the Mediterranean, the Jewish leaders in the synagogues viciously opposed the apostles and their gospel. In the first century, the church suffered, not from Roman persecution so much as they did from Jewish persecution. Luke records this in his second volume "Acts."

They ***followed Paul, trying to undo his work*** in local churches. Paul ran into a situation where they literally harassed him in an attempt to reconvert congregations, like Galatia, back to Judaism—doing great harm to his effort.

- **Their rejection of the gospel was to the Gentiles' advantage**, as God turned the offer to "a people who were not a people." The same Holy Spirit promised to them by the Father is now being poured out on Gentiles everywhere, and the Christian faith is growing like a brush fire in high winds. In two short centuries, the gospel will have Christianized the Roman world, which is a miracle that cries out for an explanation.

- **Yet, God still loves the Jews because his gifts and calling as his original covenant nation are inalienable and irreversible.** The word "irrevocable" here means "without regret." God never regretted his election of the nation because they fulfilled the purpose for which he raised them up, according to election.

His **gifts** of being the original covenant people of God, descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the 12 tribes are irreversible.

And his **calling** to bless the nations of the earth with the Messiah—the Savior, and their temporary and partial hardening of heart until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled—that calling is irrevocable.

2. God's election included his mercy through our disobedience. Rom 11:30–32 As you once disobeyed God but now have received *mercy through their disobedience*,³¹ so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy.³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.

Both Jews and Gentiles were imprisoned to sin so that God might demonstrate his mercy to both groups, despite their disobedience to the gospel.

This sentence is a bit tangled so permit me to unravel it a bit. Essentially what Paul is saying here is that God has shown sternness to the Gentiles in the past but mercy to them in the present. Likewise, he has shown mercy to Israel in the past, but now sternness to them in the present—but mercy to them in the future.

These passages speak of God's mercy and a current mystery. God's mercy to Gentiles precedes the mystery of his regrafting of Israel back into the family of God by faith.

As we mentioned a couple weeks ago, God's pattern of salvation is mercy out of judgment.

God is sovereign in election—both electing for salvation and for wrath, imprisoning all to sin so that he may have mercy on all. Men are responsible and liable in judgment for their choices.

God shows us his grace through our disobedience.

How much can we know about this mysterious subject?

3. God's revelation of his election is sufficient for worship.

God has revealed certain mysteries to us.

- The mystery of the "cruciform" gospel.

1 Cor 2:1, 7, 10-16, "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. ² I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... ⁷ On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory... ¹⁰ Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...¹⁴ But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually. ¹⁵ The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. ¹⁶ For "who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

- The gospel of salvation in the shape of the cross of Christ is God's counterintuitive wisdom that he hid as secret/mystery. It is now revealed in two ways: (1) the apostolic preaching/teaching. This involves proclamation and explanation/exposition. (2) the Holy Spirit who enlightens the mind to the truth of the gospel—giving us "understanding" apart from which we could not possibly arrive at the conclusion that the world's rightful King and Lord is a crucified Jew from backwater Nazareth who is now resurrected from the dead to vindicate his claim to that position.

The idea that the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of God's Gospel which is in the shape of the cross would be a nonsense message to people whose only frame of reference is Caesar's gospel in the shape of a double edged sword.

- The mystery of Gentile Inclusion.

Rom 16:25–26 (Isa 42:6 "a light to the nations"; Isa 60:3; 61:11; Zech 14:16; Hos 1:9; 2:1, 23; Amos 9:12) "Now to him who is able to strengthen you **according to my gospel** and the proclamation about Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery** kept silent for long ages ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic Scriptures, **according to the command of the eternal God** to advance the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." Very few people saw this coming.

But after you see it in the OT prophets, you can't unsee it. God's plan all along, tucked away and hiding in plain sight, was to reveal his gospel to the Gentile world. And Paul calls this a mystery now revealed.

- The mystery of the Jews' future reconciliation.

Rom 11:25 "I don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." The partial and apparently temporary hardening of heart that national-ethnic Israel has undergone is mysterious. And Paul reveals to us by inspiration of the Spirit that God's purpose in election cannot be frustrated or interrupted by the will or effort of man—his purpose in election must stand. And God has purposed that in the future, a remnant of national-ethnic Jews will repent of their unbelief and trust in the Gospel for salvation. And this will coincide with the ending of his offer to the Gentiles for salvation.

God hasn't revealed everything to us. Paul now leads us in a hymn of praise to God—his "Ode to God's Wisdom and Knowledge."

- God has limited our knowledge regarding His foreknowledge and predestination.

Rom 11:33–34 "Oh, the depth of the riches and the **wisdom** and the **knowledge** of God! How unsearchable his **judgments** and **untraceable** his ways! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? ***Listen, I'm all for philosophical theology provided that God himself has not, in his Word, imposed a limit on our exploration of any matter.*** On this matter right here (God's foreknowledge, foreordination, election, justification and glorification of his chosen people) God has given us a partial explanation on the matter. When Paul reached a certain point in the discussion, feeling as though he had exhausted the subject, he then throws up his hands and defers to the unreachable depths of the riches of God's knowledge and wisdom on the matter. How unsearchable, inscrutable and indiscernible are God's ways on the matter. Presuming to be able to solve the dilemma between God's Sovereign election and man's responsibility is a denial of what Paul teaches here. He tells us that God's judgments on the matter are beyond our intellectual and philosophical resources.

God revealed the mysteries of the gospel to us. And Paul says right here that there are aspects of this doctrine that are not revealed—not discernable—not amenable to philosophical exploration.

- Everything pertaining to salvation is pure act of grace.

Rom 11:35 “And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?” God’s grace to us is not a reward for anything good or bad that we have done (just like Jacob and Esau). It’s not the reward of our faith either. Our faith in Jesus is the instrument or the means by which God delivers free grace to us. But he doesn’t reward us with grace because he looked down the corridor of history to see that we would freely choose him. As spiritually dead men we cannot merely choose to raise ourselves to life; as blind and darkened in our minds to the corruption of sin we cannot merely choose to not be blind anymore—we remain without spiritual sight until the Spirit has taught us, in spiritual words, the truth of the Gospel; and as enslaved, imprisoned men and women, caged in our sins—we cannot simply choose to walk out of prison until our deliverer sets us free. And whom the Son sets free is free indeed. **Paul, in this profound song, reminds us of his doctrine of grace—Who has ever given to God that God must remunerate them, and reward them with salvation for a life well lived?** No one. God owes no sinner mercy at all.

- God is the source, the means, and the goal of His plan of salvation.

Rom 11:36 “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” I have to say, this statement is the cure for a kind of narcissistic Christianity that can take over churches today. God’s highest aim is his own glory, and his second-highest aim is that we would discover our purpose and find our joy in Him.

Ephesians 1:11–14 “In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were **predestined according to the plan** of the one who works out everything in agreement with the **purpose of his will**,¹² so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might **bring praise to his glory**.¹³ In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, **to the praise of his glory.**”

Where all of this has been leading is right here—God’s plan was to work out everything in history in conformity to his will. Paul says twice in this passage, that as God works out his purpose in our lives it is to his glorious praise!

God is most glorified when we discover our purpose according to his will—this is what brings him glorious praise. This, I would argue, is the only path to being content, and experiencing true joy in life.

This isn’t some pie-in-the-sky-sermonizing. This really is the cure for a miserable narcissistic life.

Application:

For those who are uninterested in thinking about the mystery of salvation—I would encourage you to spend some time meditating on what God has revealed.

The passage also challenges us to check our theories at the door and to live in the knowledge that what God has revealed is sufficient for us to bring him glorious praise. God’s goal for us is not our intellectual satisfaction on the matter, but for us to bring Him glory and honor.

How might changing the focus of your life to the God who is the source, the means, and the goal of our salvation—how might that change our outlook on life? How would it cure us of a self-obsessed, self-focused existence?

“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.”