

## ***Has God Rejected Israel?***

Romans 11:1-10;

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By Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson

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### **OPENING PRAYER:**

Gracious God, we are here this evening because of your faithfulness. And in our personal lives, we are able to testify to the ways in which your word has come true. Your promises have been realized for us. And when we think of the multitude of years of life we represent together tonight in this congregation, and the way in which you have been faithful not only to each of us, but to all of us. And then remember that you have been faithful, down through the generations, we marvel at your wonderful care for your people. Your governing of the world and history. And we thank you that you have not left us in the dark, as to how you manage the world. Or how you keep your promise. So that even though we often walk through the dark, we are able to shine the light of Your Word in our situation, and in our circumstance, on our perplexity into our discouragements, and even our despair. And know that you work everything together for the good of those who love you, who are called according to your purpose. We marvel at the greatness of your ways. We marvel at the mystery of your providence in history. And we pray as we turn to your word to find light, that you would shed light into our hearts by your Holy Spirit. That your word may be to us a living and active word. That our hearts may be sensitive to it, our minds, expanded by it, our affections of love and devotion, and wonder towards you increased through its teaching. So we come, our Heavenly Father, with open hearts and ears, and pray that You would speak to us and teach us again, that we may worship and serve you well. We pray this for Jesus our Savior sake. Amen. Please be seated.

### **SCRIPTURE READING:**

Well we're turning this evening, again to this great section in Romans. And to the beginning of the 11th chapter this evening, Romans chapter 11. And this evening, we read the first 10 verses of that section, as we continue our studies, in Paul's surely has his most substantial letter, certainly, in terms of the instruction it gives to the church and the challenge it provides for us, both in our thinking, and in our affections, and in our living.

Paul, as we have seen this greatly burdened for his kinsmen, according to the flesh. He has told us that at the beginning of chapter nine, he's in a position where if it were possible, he would offer himself to be cursed by God, in order, as he says, at the beginning of chapter 10, that they might discover salvation. His heart's desire and prayer is that they may be saved. And he has, in chapter nine, shown how God has worked his sovereign purposes out in the midst of history. And has shown then and

chapter 10, that the total responsibility for Israel's condition lies on Israel's shoulders. And now he comes to the 11th chapter.

*I ask, then, has God rejected His people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works: otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 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." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."*

### **SERMON:**

Paul's great contention in his letter to the Romans, is that men and women may be justified by God's grace through faith in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law. And we saw in the earlier chapters of Romans, how the apostle Paul was misunderstood in teaching this. One of the things he was misunderstood to say was that he was overturning the law of God, and therefore rejecting the Old Testament scriptures. But he had emphasized right from the very beginning, that this righteousness of God that comes in the Gospel through faith in Jesus Christ, is a righteousness that's given to us by God's grace, apart from the law. And yet, it is the very righteousness by grace to which the law and the prophets bear witness. In other words, whenever he is accused of overturning the Old Testament scriptures, he goes back to the Old Testament Scriptures, and indicates that his accusers have misunderstood those scriptures. But rather like the Lord Jesus Christ, and indeed, Jesus' martyr, Stephen, who played such a part in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the accusation persists in Paul's ministry. That he is against the Old Testament teaching, and that in particular, he is against his own people, Israel. But rather than being, if I may use the word anti-semitic, the apostle Paul gives such clear evidence here that he has a profound love and a deep passion for his own kinsmen. His heart is breaking, because they are not trusting in Jesus as the Messiah. And he is, he is working through this burden that he has. And defending the gospel against this accusation that is made against it. And as he does so, he uncovers in a very remarkable way, so many different scriptures. If you are looking at the English Standard Version, you simply need to flip over the pages and notice the indented quotations. Or look at the bottom of the page and look at those tiny letters that indicate the citations that there are from the Old Testament scriptures to realize that the apostle Paul is a master of the Old Testament Scriptures. And He is using the Old Testament scriptures in order to prove the truth of the gospel. To explain the present situation of Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is presumably doing here, then some of the things of which we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that whenever he went to a city and went to the synagogue, he reasoned with his fellow countrymen out of the scriptures, that Jesus was the Messiah. And so we must here have a little taste of Paul's powerful preaching. His use of the scriptures. And we remember how from the very end of the Acts of the Apostles, even when he was imprisoned under house arrest in Rome waiting for his trial, in the very last verses of the Acts of the Apostles, he invites the Jewish leaders to come to 'em. And again, he

expounds the scriptures to them. But again, as Luke his companion says in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, "The hearts of his fellow countrymen are hardened, their eyes are blind, and they will not receive Christ as their Messiah." And he has been, he has been pressing home, hasn't he in chapter 10, that it is their responsibility? For example, in chapter 10, verse three, "they have been ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and they have independently and arrogantly sought to establish their own righteousness." And as a result, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. Of course, Paul's fellow countrymen, were not the last people to do that. How often that is done, not simply in Paul's day in the Jewish synagogue, but in the churches in western Christendom for centuries. I know many, many men who have gone to preach the gospel in Protestant churches of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, and have reasoned with the congregation out of the scriptures, and been rejected for this reason.

First, that people have said, this is a novel message. Thus betraying their ignorance, not only of church history, but of Scripture. And have then chosen to establish their own righteousness, rather than in humble faith and conscious need come to Jesus Christ, and receive the righteousness of God in Him. It must be the single most obvious characteristic of modern Protestantism, that this is the case. And Paul wants to emphasize that the fault does not lie in the Gospel. The fault lies in those who have rejected the Gospel. And this is such an appalling situation. Paul realizes this because he's able to look back at the time when he sat where they sat. He understands that blindness. He understands that hardness of heart. He understands the fury that was leveled against him as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because he was personally active in all of these things before he was brought to faith in Jesus Christ. But as he works through the Scriptures, and as he looks at his contemporary situation among his own kinsmen, according to the flesh, he leaves them utterly inexcusable for their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. And now he comes, doesn't he in chapter 11 and verse one, to the obvious question. Actually, it's the third of four questions that he poses with similar introductions. Chapter 10, verse 18: "But I ask." Chapter 10, verse 19: "But I ask." Chapter 11 verse one: "Now I ask." Chapter 11, verse 11: "So I ask." And you sense he's coming rigorously to the grand climax and conclusion of his argument. And so the question he asks, in a sense, if we have been tracking with him, it's the most obvious question. "So I ask then, has God rejected His people?" And everything he has said to this point, underscores for us, that that would indeed be the logical conclusion of all this. His people have rejected, His beloved Son. There is surely only one thing left for God to do. And that is in righteous holy judgment, to reject these people who have rejected him. And yet, for all he has said, in these chapters nine, and 10, the astonishing thing here is, and I hope we feel something of the astonishment of his conclusion, his conclusion is to say, the very reverse. "By no means, he says. And do you remember from chapter six, verse one and verse 15, and chapter seven, where he had used the same expression. Again, this is Paul reacting, as it were, to the suggestion with the whole of his being his emotions tighten up, but the very thought that this would be the conclusion of his argument. The older versions used to put it so strongly trying to capture the strength of his negative, "God forbid that this should be the case."

And yet, in many ways, this is a wholly unexpected conclusion, isn't it? And it requires -- and Paul himself recognizes it requires some elucidation. And this is what he gives us in these first 10 verses. We are surely here at one of the steep climbs in the mountain peak, the Everest of Paul's letter to the Romans. And so we need to follow exactly what he is saying. And perhaps we can do that by recognizing that from verse one B, to the end of verse four, Paul is giving us an exposition of his response, "By no means." In verses five and six, he draws some implications from that. In verse seven,

he gives us a conclusion. And then as so characteristic of him, he confirms this conclusion by words of confirmation from the pages of sacred Scripture.

How can Paul say, in the light of all the rejection of Jesus as Messiah, that God has not rejected His people? Well, he gives his answer, you'll notice in several parts in his exposition. First of all, he responds in what I think is an auto biographical way. Has God rejected Israel, by no means I, myself, am an Israelite. Now there are, there are students of Scripture who think that at this point Paul is saying, I'm an Israelite, I could never draw that conclusion. Just as I might make a suggestion to many of you, and you would say, God forbid that that would be the case. I myself, am a citizen of the United States of America. Such a person should never draw such a conclusion. But I think myself what Paul is really saying is this, "I myself, am proof positive, that God has not rejected Israel, because I myself am an Israelite." It's his auto biographical argument. It's his own testimony that says, that cannot possibly be the conclusion because God has had mercy on me. And of all Israelites, indeed, he wants to claim this universally, of all men, he says, "I am the chief sinner." And in some ways, of course, it's right for us to say to ourselves, we should all feel that way. But in some sense, Paul felt that was quite literally true, not just because of the depth of his own sinfulness but because he was the sinner who sought to destroy the entirety of the Christian church. And may well have been in danger of doing the very same thing from a human point of view. All that -- all rebellious Israelites had done in their response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as Paul could say of himself in Philippians three, that he doesn't wear outreached them all in his pedigree, he could also say he had outreach them all in his sinful rebellion against the gospel of Jesus Christ. But he himself is proof positive, that God has not rejected his people, Israel.

And this for him is a great sign of hope. Now we can understand something of that at the personal level. How often have you said to yourself, as you've prayed for somebody, or witness to somebody who has repulsed your witness, "Lord, You have saved me. And if you can save me, you can save them, if you've broken into my life, you can break into their life too." And so he has some assurance from his own life, that God has certainly not entirely rejected his people, Israel.

And then he gives us what seems to be a doctrinal reason. There's an auto biographical reason, and there's a doctrinal reason. Verse 2. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. He did not after all, choose them in his love, because of any quality in them, they too were sinners. And Paul, as it were, rests his soul in this great biblical principle, that when God sets his loving purposes into the world, God means to fulfill those loving purposes down through the years.

And then, as it were, to cap it all, which the Apostle Paul loves to do, he reasons now not only autobiographically, and doctrinal a he reasons scripturally. And he says, perhaps he has had to say this to himself, because sometimes he probably did feel, "God am I the only Israelite who will be saved." And he had gone back to his old Testament Scriptures, and you see what he says, He says, as it was, "In the days of Elijah." When Elijah felt himself to be entirely alone, and God came to him and said, "Elijah, lift up your spirits. I have seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." And he says, "Just as it was, then, so it is now." Many Israelites, the majority of Israelites have rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He has seen that everywhere he's gone, and yet everywhere he has gone, there have been those who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

Fascinating actually, to remember that little incident when Paul arrived in Jerusalem in Acts 21 and visited James, the Great Leader of the Jerusalem church. And after greeting them he related one by

one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And do you remember what James said to him in that context? James said to him, in that context, "Paul, don't you see, that there are also 1000s, of our fellow kinsmen, who have come to faith in Jesus Christ". You see, James was encouraging him. And showing him, as Paul says here, that there remained an election of God in Israel according to grace.

And that, of course, is precisely the implication that Paul draws here in verses five to six. Whereas Elijah said, "They've killed your prophets. Demolished your alters, I'm alone left they seek my life." And God said, "Elijah, I have 7000 to have not bowed the knee to Baal." Here is the implication Paul draws. "So too at the present time." By which I think he means not simply, so too in 55 A.D. or whatever the year was that this letter was written. I think he means, that is to say, not just in the past Old Testament time, but in this New Covenant era. God in His mercy has kept a remnant chosen by grace.

But he says, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace." Now, why does he say that? What's the implication that he's drawing here? Well, it's this. It is, that if the Israelite is to be saved, he must be saved by exactly the same grace by which the Apostle Paul has been saved. And that is a permanent reality. Paul understands that God does not provide one way of salvation for Israel, in the present age, or in the past age, and a different way of salvation for the Gentiles. There was only one way of salvation in the Old Testament. And there is only one way of salvation in the New Testament era. There never will be any other way of salvation, apart from the way of Grace. And because that is so important to him, Paul emphasizes this, he says, spelling it out, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise, grace would no longer be grace."

Now, of course, that was what the Old Testament Scriptures taught. The Old Testament Scriptures taught that men and women and boys and girls are saved by grace. It doesn't, just in case any of us should be confused about this, it never taught that anybody could be or would be saved by keeping the law. By their works of righteousness. It never taught that. That's why Paul, who teaches that salvation is by grace, has been using so many illustrations from the Old Testament scriptures to show that this gospel is absolutely consistent with the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures.

But of course, it was one thing for that to be the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures. It was another thing for that to be understood by those who heard and read the Old Testament Scriptures. And there are all these indications already in the Old Testament Scriptures about how the people of God who had been given the message of salvation by grace would lose sight of their need of grace, and would fall back upon establishing their own righteousness. Perhaps a little bit of grace, and plenty of works. And some kind of combination of the two. Perhaps the clearest illustration of that in the New Testament is in the illustration Jesus uses, in his parable of the Pharisee and the Publican isn't it? Israel hearing that parable. And Jesus asking the question, "Now, which of these two men left the temple justified?", might well have said it was the Pharisee? Who left justified? Because after all, didn't speak about grace? Didn't his prayer begin: "I thank you, God." Isn't that a recognition of grace? Well not when the next two words are, "That I."

And there must be a million different variations of this. Whenever an individual makes a statement that says, God is gracious to me, because -- and the next word is not God, when it's any other word, then grace is no longer grace. God I thank you. You've been so gracious to me, because I fast twice a week and I pay In my tithes, and I distribute my largess. And I am so grateful to you, oh god for that grace,

because in the last analysis, I have contributed to it. And therefore, as Paul says here, "grace is no longer grace."

Now, my friends, that's not simply a phenomenon of the Judaism with which the Apostle Paul was dealing, although it very obviously was characteristic of that Judaism. It was characteristic of that Judaism because it's characteristic of the human heart. And it's just as characteristic of religious Roman Catholics and religious Protestants down through the centuries.

Do you know that perhaps one of the greatest heresies alive in the English speaking world is that you are justified by dying? Have you noticed how frequently people say that kind of thing? "We are glad his suffering has ended, and he's in a better place." Why is he in a better place? Because He trusted in Jesus Christ? Because the fruits of that trust were evident in his life. No, the reason he's in a better place is because he's died. It's as simple as that. But that's not grace. Or the ever so subtle. Yes, I am glad God is gracious to me. Because I know I haven't quite made 100%. And so what we believe in is topping up grace. But Paul says topping up grace is not grace. Topping Up grace is a negotiated contract in my tiny little and strangely twisted mind. It's not grace. Wherever I think there is anything in me, that calls for God's grace to me, apart from that sin that makes his sheer Grace necessary to me, that's exactly the point at which I have disgraced grace. And it's no more grace.

You know, half of our denomination was forged in those fires. In the 18th century in Scotland -- the famous Morrow men, including our beloved Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, and Thomas Boston, and these other men. Who all belong to a denomination that confess that salvation was by grace alone. But in which what was effectually believed by members and sadly taught by ministers is that heaven helps those who help themselves. Heaven helps those who help themselves.

I've never forgotten. Maybe I've told you this before. It's just come into my mind. Watching the little golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez, you remember him, those of you who would like to watch golf? Amazing little golfer. And how if he hauled a long putt he would do all this kind of sword dance thing with his putter and the microphones were on. On one occasion as he sank this long putt, I heard him say, "Heaven helps those who help themselves." But that's not grace. That's - not - grace! Heaven helps those who cannot help themselves. That's grace. Heaven helps the helpless. That's grace. I wonder if you've ever seen that? Let me put it this way. We are a relatively conservative group of people, we probably tend to vote in the same way on moral issues. We are not enthusiastic about liberal theological seminaries. There isn't a liberal Theological Seminary in the world that denies that salvation is by grace. There isn't a minister in the world whose confession denies that salvation is by grace. But the confession is a totally different thing from the actual reality. And the same can be true of us. Paul is wanting to confirm here that if there is this elect seed according to grace, it must be understood that the salvation of his kinsmen, according to the flesh, will be entirely of unmerited grace.

Some of you read the great novels of the relatively recently deceased, a scholar Khayyam Pathak. Absolutely wonderful, wonderful novels, about groups of Hasidic Jews in New York. Mainly from, mainly European refugees, who so believe in grace, that they never mourn on Sabbath. Never mourn on Sabbath, because Sabbath is a day of joy. But how do they understand grace, they understand it like this, God Yahweh. Hashem the name because they don't use the ineffable name. And they no longer know how to pronounce it. The name is gracious to us, because we have suffered so much. That's not grace. God is gracious to the suffering, but he has never gracious to the suffering on the basis that their suffering merits His grace.

You see, this is the thing that is so difficult for us to understand. And that challenge to our thinking, and therefore to our feeling, and therefore to our relationship with God does not go away overnight once we are converted. But the moment I think that God is gracious to me, because of something in me, that's the point at which I begin to deny that God is really gracious. And that's the point at which I begin to make contracts with God. "Therefore if I X, you will be more gracious to me." Don't you find that really hard to take? And of course, you find it hard to take in, because it's my native disposition. Even although I be regenerate and understand the gospel, it's my native disposition to think there must be something in me. And that's the reason why God has been gracious to me. And perhaps the reason he's not being gracious to anyone else. And Paul is saying that's not grace.

You know, I think what is the most striking thing about this is that that means the most humbling truth in all the scriptures is not the truth of God's holiness and law that convicts us of our sin. The most humbling truth in Scripture is actually that the only way of salvation is through grace. And therefore nothing in my hand I bring. "Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for Grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior or I die."

So you see, while he's speaking about his own people. And while he's, he's working through the purposes of God towards Israel in history, he's saying things he's throwing out principles that are applicable to us all. And you see the great thing, certainly the biblical thing is, that when this grips me, it fills my soul with wonder and joy and freedom and praise in a way that absolutely nothing else under the sun can.

So he gives his exposition. He draws out the implication. He comes to his conclusion. He says in verse seven, that Israel as a whole never found what it sought. And he's explained to us why, and that's because Israel sought righteousness by self establishment rather than by God's sheer unmerited grace. And so he says, as he comes to his conclusion of this section, "Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking, the elect obtained it. But the rest were hardened. You see that? By grace, this little remnant, Paul and his kinsmen, actually later on in at the end of Romans he has this absolutely fabulous little line where he, he wants to greet two people in Rome, whom he says were his relatives. And they were Christians before he was. So they're all over the place. But they are not the majority. The rest, he says, "were hardened." And that he confirms by pointing us to the Scriptures. And it's the Scriptures He uses that are so arresting. He refers here, you notice to Isaiah 29, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see, ears that would not hear. Down to this very day." Perhaps that's a reference to Deuteronomy 29. Or perhaps it's just slipping it in there as a kind of biblical phrase. And then, having cited the prophets, here, he turns to the law and the writings and he cites the Psalms. He cites what I think is actually the second most frequently cited Psalm, in the whole of the New Testament, the 69th Psalm. Which is a psalm about the sufferings and salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in the midst of it, let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. Their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see and bend their backs forever. You see, he's saying, it's all in your scriptures, and you haven't seen it. Not only do you not see that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the way of salvation is by God's unmerited sheer grace, but you don't see what the Scriptures themselves have said. And when I say, Paul is saying, the rest were hardened, that's exactly what your own scriptures have said. But even the Scriptures he cites are telling. Because behind them is this notion that in a sense, what is causing the hardening is that they have had the grace offered to them in the Gospel. Those words of David, at the beginning of verse nine, let their table become a snare, and a trap. You know, this kind of conjures up a picture of these toys that the children I think, again, have, I can't

remember what they're called the the one thing and they turn into another thing. Here's a table that turns into a snare and a trap. What's the point that Paul is making? Well, what is a table in the Old Testament, a table is a place where food rests. Where provision is found. Where plenty is to be discovered. "You prepare a table for me", says David in Psalm 23, "in the midst of my enemies." It's a metaphor for God's gracious provision for us. Come and eat, you who have no money. Come and buy food without price, without cost. Eat and your soul shall live. The table is spread with the plenty of God's favor and God's grace. What's the problem? It is that at the end of the day, it's not simply the law and it's accusations that harden the human heart. It's the gospel and it's saving grace. If you doubt that, I wish for a short season you could become a preacher of the gospel, and see how often and how, tragically, it is true. This is what the older writers used to call God's strange work. That's the very gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. That promises free and full salvation. Riches spread upon the table of God's plentiful supply for sinful men and women like us, and we will have nothing of it. And so we harden our hearts, and we harden our hearts. And we harden our hearts against his grace. Paul is saying that's what's happened. And in thinking, here is the tragedy, in thinking that they are overthrowing the table of the gospel and triumphing over it, as they sought to overthrow Paul and triumphed over him as he preached the gospel. And all they did was harden their hearts, harden their hearts, harden their hearts. Paul, in these words, is surely reminding us of other words, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart against him.

Well, do you really believe in grace? You really believe that your only hope is that God in His mercy should look down upon your undeserving heart and pursue you? Bring you to himself and embrace you? Or are there still those remnants... And dear Christian friends, they linger long and the Christian heart too, that resists the very grace that has the power to dilute the last remnants of our self dependence and bring us to a glorious freedom and joyful salvation. Grace is other than we think, don't you think? So let's, let's sink our souls into it. Let's, let's allow the sheerness of God's grace, to dilute all, all those last cries that we make. And we make them in a multitude of different ways. There is something still in me that I've contributed to my salvation, isn't there? My dear friends, there's absolutely nothing. And so long as I think that is something, the only thing I can do with the message of the absoluteness, fullness and sheerness of God's grace is to press it back, harden my heart, and resist it. .

Amazing Grace. Still amazed by grace? Or should we sing accustomed grace? Or rather well deserved grace? Or shall we sing "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Who once was lost, and now is found. Was blind but now can see.

Mr. Miller, I wonder if we can sing that at the end of the service, if you could look it up and play it. I know you know it well. And we know it well. And I'll pray while Mr. Miller is looking that up. And then let's stand and sing of Amazing Grace.

### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

Heavenly Father, bowl us over we pray by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Drown us in the sense of its freeness and sheerness. Baptize us in the sense of its sheer wonder and absolutely undeserved nature. And oh, we pray, make it we ask such a pharmaceutical in our hearts, that less and less will we trust in self and more and more will we trust in Jesus Christ, that we may live and praise You for the sake of your glorious grace. And this we pray together in Jesus, our Savior's name, amen.