

Session 54: The Election of Grace

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 54)

Today, I want to discuss 3 issues:

1. Faith and works
2. Grace in both programs
3. Israel's blindness

Acts 15:10 *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*

Acts 15:11 *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

Peter was thinking like a Jew; he was still using the “we” (Israelites) and “they” (Gentiles) terminology.

Notice that Peter did not say that the Gentiles would get saved like we did, but he said “we shall be saved, even as they.” Peter never said that the Gentiles would be saved like us, but that Jews would be saved like the Gentiles.

How does a Jew get saved during this period of time? By doing what the Gentiles do! This fits perfectly with what we will see Paul write in Romans 11:14.

Romans 11:14 *If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.*

What does it mean to emulate someone? It means to copy what they are doing. Paul was trying to get the Jews, who were at that time living in the dispensation of Gentile grace, to do what the Gentiles were doing. That was exactly what Peter was talking about in Acts 15. After Paul had met with him privately, Peter understood Paul's message.

Take this back to Romans 11:5.

Romans 11:5 *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

Paul was making the argument that grace operates independently of all human works. Look at the verses. Paul said there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Grace is not by works. If it were, then it would not be grace. You cannot be saved apart from your works and by your

works at the same time. All of these guys, who are preaching that anyone is saved by grace and works, are combining terms which are mutually exclusive.

If you were to continue to read in Acts 15, you would see that the apostles in Jerusalem agreed to confine their ministry to the little flock, and Paul would minister to the heathen which included unsaved Israel. As part of his ministry to the believing remnant of Israel, Peter writes two epistles: 1 and 2 Peter.

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Because Peter was writing to those who were “scattered,” it meant that he wrote that after Acts 8.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. ³ As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. ⁴ Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

When Peter writes his epistles to these scattered members of the little flock, notice what he says in verse 10.

1 Peter 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

I want to talk about the second issue which is grace in both program: dispensation of Gentile grace, and dispensation of law.

Space for personal reflection and notes

Session 55: The Issue of Grace

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 55)

When people read the word “grace” they sometimes make the mistake of thinking that it is always referring to the dispensation of Gentile grace. God has been gracious all throughout Israel’s program, even though it was a dispensation of law and not grace.

1 Peter 1:10 *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:*

Genesis 6:8 *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.*

Did that mean the dispensation of Gentile grace started in Genesis 6? Of course not.

According to 1 Peter 1:10, did Israel anticipate grace? Keep in mind a couple of things:

Peter is writing during the dispensation of Gentile grace.

Was Peter saying that the prophets foretold of the “grace” that was being offered during the dispensation of Gentile grace?

Peter does not say that the grace was already here. What was the prophetic grace that Peter was talking about? He said, ‘which shall come unto you...’

The “grace” that Peter says the prophets foretold is in connection with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ...

1 Peter 1:13 *Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*

...which will signal the restoration of the nation of Israel and the implementation of the new covenant. That new covenant is God’s grace to the nation of Israel. That is where they receive spiritual fitness to be that “great nation” and “kingdom of priests,” etc.

As Peter writes to the surviving members of the little flock, who are living in his day, he is also writing a letter that will be intended for the future members of the believing remnant of Israel who also will be looking forward to the prophetic grace which is promised to the foolish nation.

When it comes to this grace, when it comes to the new covenant, is it going to be grace or by works? The new covenant is based upon God’s promise to himself!

Look again at 1 Peter 1:13 and notice that they are to “hope to the end” for that grace which accompanies the Lord Jesus at his advent. Are we, as members of the body of Christ, waiting for that grace or do we already have grace?

Do you see the difference between the grace Israel is looking for and the grace which the body of Christ enjoys today? We need to make that distinction. Israel does have grace waiting for them out in their future.

***Romans 11:5** Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.⁶ And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

Those members of the remnant saw their need of a Redeemer and they understood they could never justify themselves by the law. It is through this believing remnant that Israel will be restored in the future (Paul is about to tell us when that will be) and all of the promises and covenants will be literally fulfilled with them (the foolish nation).

***Acts 13:14** But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.¹⁵ And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.¹⁶ Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.*

***Acts 13:39** And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

***Romans 11:5** Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

‘Grace elects everyone who responds to it.’

We need to recall the context of what is taking place in Romans 11. Paul is giving evidence that God has not “cast away his people.”

Paul is telling the truth because the promises and covenants are to them (the remnant): the true Israel of God. Therefore, God has not “cast away” his people in the sense that he is through with them forever.

Verse 7 asks, ‘well, if God has not cast away his people, then what is he doing, because obviously he is not continuing his program with them right now?’

***Romans 11:7** What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*

Now we are getting into the third issue of Israel's blindness.

We need to comment just a bit on this verse, but the amplification of verse 7 is found in the following verses 8-10.

The "What then?" is the question to ask, 'if God has not cast Israel away, then what is he doing with them?'

Space for personal reflection and notes

Session 56: The Issue of Blindness

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 56)

Romans 11:7 *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*

When Paul follows that question with “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for,” what was Israel seeking for? They were seeking to be righteous. They were zealous of it.

Romans 9:31 *But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. ³² Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;*

Romans 10:2 *For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

Verse 7 said that Israel did not obtain the righteousness they were seeking for, but the election obtained it! Who was “the election?” It was the believing remnant. They obtained the righteousness which was by faith.

‘Grace elects everyone who responds to it.’

What happened to the rest of Israel? Verse 7 said the rest were blinded. That was the issue to be understood; the present status of the unbelieving element of the nation is one of being “blinded.” Do not confuse being “blinded” with being “cast away.” Being “cast away” and being “blinded” are not the same thing.

In this case they cannot be the same thing because Israel has not been cast away but they have been blinded.

Remember that being cast away is to say God is finished with Israel forever and we know from verse 2 that is not the case. But Israel has been blinded. Not all of Israel, but the part of Israel which did not obtain the righteousness by faith: unbelieving Israel. They were blinded. Blinded in what way? What does it mean to be “blinded?”

You may be tempted to think that their being “blinded” is in reference to the gospel, which (you may think) explains why not many/most Jews do not receive Christ. But this is not what their

blindness is about. Historically, most of Israel has rejected Jesus as the Christ. So, their present day rejection is nothing new.

The fact that they reject Jesus today is only a continuation of their stumbling from back in the extension of mercy, their rejection prior to the cross, their rebellion that sent them into captivity, and their walking contrary to God since the time they entered the promised land. The point here is their rejection was nothing new; therefore, why blind Israel from the truth now?

By the way, how many people does God want to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) – all of them?

1 Timothy 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

Well, if God wants all men to be saved, then why would he blind Israel so that they cannot be saved? That does not make any sense.

God, like Paul, wants them to be saved. God is not putting up some blanket of darkness to keep them from seeing the truth and being saved as though that is their punishment for rejecting his Son. God is not saying: ‘okay, if you guys want to reject my Son, then I am going to do something that keeps you from seeing the truth and you will not be saved.’ That is just the opposite of what he is doing during this dispensation of Gentile grace.

In fact, that is contrary to grace because grace is not given based on merit or deserving it. If God is punishing Israel today then God is not dealing with the world under grace. That is not what the scripture teaches about how God is dealing with the world. He is being “longsuffering” (Romans 2:4 and 9:22-24). If God is judging Israel, then he could not be longsuffering.

I mean, if God’s intention is to keep Israel from being saved, then why would he “provoke Israel to jealousy?” Why “provoke them to emulation?”

I know we are not there yet, but in verse 14, Paul says that provoking Israel to emulation is for the purpose of saving them.

Romans 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

The point here is to say that the blindness is not to the gospel. So what is the blindness?

To answer this question, let us first examine blindness itself. While a person may suffer physical blindness because of an accident or a disease, the kind of blindness Paul is talking about is not a physical blindness where men can no longer see with their eyes; he is talking about a spiritual blindness.

Even though those are two different kinds of blindness, there is a parallel between physical blindness and spiritual blindness.

Other than accident or disease, there are two major causes of blindness. The first one is light. This one happened to Paul at the time of his conversion on the Damascus road.

Acts 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, ² And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. ³ And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: ⁴ And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

We are not given all the details in Acts 9. When Paul recounts his conversion to King Agrippa in Acts 26, he gives some further details.

Acts 26:12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Acts 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. ⁸ And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

The brightness of the light blinded Paul. If it were not for the miracle of healing performed by Ananias, Paul would have been blinded the rest of this life.

Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

It is no surprise that a bright enough light can cause physical blindness. That is why welders wear a helmet to protect their eyes.

Let us look at another aspect of this. If a light is shining in your eyes, even if it will not blind you; you still are not able to see. Hence, we shield the light with our hands, or with some object so we can see. It is possible to be ‘blinded by the light.’

There is something else that can “blind” us in the sense that we cannot see and that is darkness. While our eyes and brain have a remarkable ability to acclimate and see with little light, darkness keeps us from being able to see and in that sense, we are “blinded.” How many of us have hit our toe on the bed frame at night because we did not see it in the dark?

Now with all that in our minds, let us look again at the verse.

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

What was Israel’s seeking? Righteousness. And how were they trying to obtain that righteousness – by the works of the law. Here was what verse 7 was saying: the works of the law blinded those Israelites.

Not only did the works of the law blind them back in their program so that they could not ‘see’ that righteousness was by faith alone, but Paul is saying that they are still blinded!

Are they blind because God is a mean-spirited God who is punishing them by keeping them from the truth? No.

When God’s word is working, it produces one of two responses: either faith or unbelief. Many Israelites are blinded by their pursuit of self-righteousness, and as a result, they reject the light of the truth.

If you reject light, all you are left with is blindness. In the past, Israel was blinded to her apostasy. She was blinded to her Messiah. She was blinded as to the proper function of the law. She was blinded as to how to obtain righteousness.

Now, as Paul writes in the dispensation of Gentile grace, Israel not only continues to be blinded to those things, but she is also blind to recognizing her “fall” and to what God is now doing with the Gentiles (the dispensational change).

Space for personal reflection and notes