



All Israel Will Be Saved

Romans 11:25-32

Rev. Fred Greco

Now this morning if you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you to turn to the book of Romans. We're going to be looking this morning at Romans, chapter 11, verses 25-32. It is indeed a challenging passage, so in that respect, I hope you are ready to hear from the Lord in his Word. If you were with us last week, we had another equally challenging passage that taxed, I think, our attentiveness and even our ability to understand all that Paul was saying.

This morning, as we turn to the book of Romans, let us remember that the Word of the Lord is completely without error, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 11, beginning at verse 25:

"Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'; 'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.' As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we come to you, O Lord, for we realize that we cannot understand your Word apart from the work of your Spirit. It is by the work of your Holy Spirit illuminating our hearts that we can know and understand your will. We are thankful that you have inspired your apostle Paul to put down the words you have for us this morning. We pray, O Lord, as we read them that we would mark them, that they would take deep root in our hearts and change us forevermore. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

This morning, as we look at this passage, this passage is, in many ways, the culmination of Paul's argument in chapters 9-11. If you can believe it, we have spent almost four months in chapters 9-11. When we first started Romans, you may not have guessed that we would have spent this much time in Paul's text telling us about the Jews and the future of the Jews.

You might have thought, "Well, surely we could spend four or five months in Romans 1-3 or even more than that in Romans 6-8, but do we really need to spend this much time when Paul is talking about the Jews?" Yet at the same time, this section of the text holds for us a fascination. It deals with interesting subjects: Israel's future, Israel and its relationship with the Gentiles, the decrees of God.

At the same time, it also carries with it some controversy, and if we're honest, some like that. Some of you have already approached me and asked which view I take with respect to "all Israel." It's something we're interested in and want to understand and know better. But as we approach this text, we must look for why the Holy Spirit has had Paul write this. There is a purpose for this text beyond settling a controversy. So, as we look at this text, I would like to ask of the text three questions.

First... *Why does Paul take this up?* In other words, why does Paul take up the question of the future of Israel? Why does he tell us all Israel will be saved? The second question that obviously comes from the text is... *Who is "all Israel"?* I know you want to know. What does Paul mean by "all Israel" in our text this morning? Then thirdly, we can ask ourselves... *What can we learn from this?* What can we get from a text written several thousand years ago about a people who lived in a land thousands and thousands of miles away? Why does Paul take this up, who is "all Israel," and what can we learn from this?

Why Does Paul Take This Up?

Let's start by asking the first question. Why does Paul take this up in the first place? The very first thing I think we see from Paul is he takes it up because it's important. Now, on one level, that should be self-evident. If something is in the Bible, it should be important. There shouldn't be unimportant things in the Bible. But I think Paul also helps us in the way he writes this to see that he believes this is important.

Our translation actually hides this a little bit. It's not a bad translation. Nothing is mistranslated, but you may have noticed that all of the other major translations follow the order of the Greek text. That is, they begin verse 25 with "I do not want you to be unaware..." whereas the ESV begins with, "Lest you be wise in your own sight..."

Again, there's no large problem with this. The ESV is a very reliable translation. Even the translation of verse 25 is helpful and does not lead us astray, but I do think it is helpful to see where Paul actually begins and the *way* he begins. It's his way of alerting to us the importance of what he's about to write. Paul actually begins, "I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery."

The phrase itself is instructive. He is about to draw attention to what he is about to say. He's using a rhetorical device called *litotes*. (I don't expect you to remember that. There won't be a quiz afterward.) *Litotes* is a way of saying something for emphasis in the negative when you want someone to take it positively. Perhaps a very homestyle example will help.

When you ask someone to do something because it will bring them joy and happiness, you might say to them, "Listen. You won't be sorry if you do this." You really don't mean to say, "You can do this and it won't make you miserable." That's not what you mean. What you mean is actually the opposite of "You'll be sorry." You mean, "This is going to be exciting. You will want to have done this. Get to this right away." That's what Paul is saying here. He says, "I don't want you to be unaware."

What he really means with the double negative is, "I really, really want you to know." Paul does this frequently to draw attention to what he's trying to say. He uses this same format. We saw it in Romans 1:13 where he said, "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you..." This was, of course, Paul's

way of saying, "I've been longing to get to you. I've been waylaid. I want to get to you as soon as I can. It's the passion of my life."

In 1 Corinthians 12, before he's about to teach on an important subject of spiritual gifts, he says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I don't want you to be uninformed." Well, he doesn't just want them to have the bare minimum of knowledge. He wants them to understand really and truly the depths of spiritual gifts, because it has been a cause of division.

Then, in what is perhaps the greatest issue for Christians in Paul's day, which is what happens to Christians who die before Jesus returns... In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, Paul says, "I don't want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep." In each of these instances, what Paul is doing is drawing our attention to the next thing he's going to say. It's very important.

So when Paul tells us he doesn't want the Romans (and us) to be unaware of this mystery, what he means is he doesn't want us to be ignorant. He doesn't want us to be uninformed. He doesn't want us to be left out. He wants to explain it. Well, what is it that is so important that Paul wants us to know about? Paul describes it here in verse 25 as a *mystery*.

Now, this word can immediately cause us a problem. Again, not because it's a bad translation, not because it isn't used by Paul in other places or Paul is using the wrong word. No. The problem is we need to avoid importing all of our meaning into the word *mystery*. When we think of a mystery, some of us think of Agatha Christie, a whodunit. No one can know, and there are all sorts of clues, and you need some sort of genius detective to put them all together. Or we think of it as a secret, a wonderful secret that is hidden, unknown to most people but only known to a select few.

Have you ever had this experience? You're busy minding your own business, and someone walks up to you and says, "You know what? I've got a secret." Immediately, what happens to you? You have to know the secret. If that's all the person says and just leaves it there, that's like a silence that weighs a ton, and you wind up saying to them, "Okay. Give it! Come on. Tell me what the secret is!"

Oftentimes, in this kind of a conversation, they'll say, "Sorry. Can't tell you." Then you say, "Well, why did you even tell me you had a secret? I was very happy not knowing there was something out there I didn't know, but now that I know I don't know it, I have to know. You have to reveal it to me. Come on. I'm worthy of this secret. I can keep a secret." This is what we do. That's what we think of a mystery or a secret.

However, when Paul uses this word, he means something that was previously concealed and has now been revealed in God's Word. It's not a secret anymore. It's an open secret, if we can use that kind of phrase. If we think about it, biblical Christianity is different from all other religions which shroud and hide the truth. They only want a few select people to know their teachings and their truth. Christianity, on the other hand, is all about revealing God's truth, about spreading it abroad, announcing the gospel from the rooftops, revealing God's truth for everyone to see.

Here, I think, is a lesson. If someone is trying to teach you a hidden secret and they say to you, "You can't tell others," that's not biblical Christianity. That's actually one of the evidences of a cult. If someone tells you, "The Bible teaches *this*, but you can't tell your parents," run away from them. If they say, "The Bible teaches *this*, but you can't tell your spouse," get clear out of there. You see, the Bible is all about revealing God's truth, not concealing it.

Finally, we have to also, along these same lines, assume that Paul is not alone in having this mystery revealed to him. Paul is repeating what he found in the Old Testament. Paul is repeating what Jesus has revealed and what the other apostles have spoken of. It is not as if Paul is setting up a rival religion to Jesus or to Peter or to the Old Testament. Why does Paul take this up? Because it's important.

Okay. Paul now has our attention. This is important, Paul. *Why* is it important, then? That's where our translation actually starts in verse 25. "Lest you be wise in your own sight..." What Paul is getting at here is his purpose in giving us this truth. *Lest* is a purpose word. It means in order that you might not or for the purpose so that you might not. That's what *lest* is. It's a purpose conjunction. So Paul has a reason for saying this. It's important, and it's important for *this* reason. The reason is so that we would not be wise in our own sight.

Now what does Paul mean by this? Shouldn't we strive to be wise? Isn't wisdom good? Well, of course it is, but this word Paul uses here has the connotation of false wisdom; that is, something we think is wise but really is not. It's actually accompanied by pride. It's the kind of knowledge that Paul tells us elsewhere puffs us up. So, when Paul is using this word, he means we should not be drawn aside by a false wisdom.

This direct statement Paul gives is actually a summary of what he has already given in verses 18-21. There, Paul warned the Gentiles (and us) not to be proud but to fear, and the word Paul uses for *proud* there is the same word he uses for *wise* in verse 25. So, what is it that the church at Rome or we, for that matter, are liable to have wrong and to have a false wisdom rather than a true wisdom?

Well, first, they thought they understood the present position of the Jews. They had seen the Jews reject Jesus Christ, and they assumed God had cast them off, that they were out of the people of God forever. What Paul is saying here is, "No. That's not the case. Don't fall for that. Don't try to have a false wisdom. That's not true." This applies to you and me today. How often are we tempted to explain the Bible and the purposes of God in terms of circumstances and current history?

Do you have any idea how many books were written about biblical prophecy that centered around the Soviet Union that doesn't even exist anymore? Do you know how many times people have tried to explain prophecy by means of the division between East and West Germany, which don't exist anymore? The truth is we can't look to our newspapers for Bible interpretation.

Secondly, the church at Rome was tempted to think they were inherently better than the Jews because they had understood the gospel and come to faith in Christ. They thought there was something about *them*, something they had done that made them better than the Jews, which is why they were saved and the Jews were not.

This is extremely practical for us. We're tempted to look at unbelievers out there and to think that, somehow, it's because we're just a bit better or just a bit smarter or just a bit superior in some way that we have come to faith in Jesus Christ, and if only they were as good as us, they would be here too. It's our inherent qualities that make us Christians.

What Paul is telling you here is, "Don't be proud. Don't try to convince yourself you are wise. There is nothing in you that differs from others to make you a follower of Jesus Christ. It is all of God, none of you. Don't fall for foolish, false wisdom." Well, Paul started this sentence by emphasizing the importance of it, and then he gave us some practical reasons for taking this matter up, but as we look at this verse, there's also a word left out of our translation. It's a word we've seen many times before: the little word *for*.

We've seen Paul use this word over and over and over again in stringing together his argument. We know he uses *for* because he's bringing up the next step in his argument. We can't forget what he has said previously, because what he is saying now is the next step in his line of argument. Paul here is continuing the argument he has made in chapter 11.

What Paul is saying is not really anything new. That may be surprising, since he tells us he is going to tell us a mystery, but we've already looked at that. It's not a secret, that something is unknown. What Paul is doing is summing up his argument, really from chapter 9, verse 4, on, but most specifically from the beginning of chapter 11.

He does this with another conjunction in the Greek. Just as previously he'd used *for* to indicate it's the next step in an argument, and just as he had used *lest* to show that he had purpose, now here he uses another conjunction, *that*, to indicate a summing up. You may have missed it, because here in our translation *that* is translated by a colon.

That's a perfectly good translation. We do this all the time when we write. We sum up an argument, we put a colon, and then we know everything that follows from that is a summary. That colon is a Greek word that means *that*. What is the summary, then, of Paul's argument? The summary of Paul's argument is that a partial hardening has come upon Israel. His summary is that Israel has been hardened. Now, this shouldn't be news to us. This is what Paul has been saying since chapter 9.

He has been describing over and over again the unbelief of Israel, the hardening of Israel, the rejection of the Messiah by Israel. Paul started this by expressing his anguish in chapter 9 because Israel had not embraced Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and then he went on to prove why that rejection didn't mean God or his Word had failed, but all of the discussions Paul has been having about election, faith, unbelief, and the remnant of Israel are really all in the context of the fact of Israel's hardening.

There are two aspects of Israel's hardening he wants us to know. First, that it is partial, and second, that it is limited in time. He picks up the first right away in verse 25. "A partial hardening has come upon Israel..." What Paul is telling us is the hardening that has come upon Israel is not total. They have not all been cast off. You remember that he has given proof of this.

He stood up and said, "I'm proof of this. I follow Jesus, and I'm a Jew, so they can't all be cast off." Then he told us of the days of Elijah in which Elijah thought he was all alone, but God had reserved to himself a remnant. Paul takes that biblical story from the Old Testament and transfers it into the present time. He tells us, "Do you think now you're all alone? No! Israel is not completely hardened."

Now, Paul does not mean the hardening or, as some translations translate it, the blindness of Israel was only partially effective. He doesn't mean it's just harder for Jews to see Jesus than other people but that's really all the challenge there is. He doesn't mean partial in its effectiveness; he means partial in its scope. That's actually the way the language is in the Greek. It is a part *of* something. This makes sense, because you can't have a partial blindness or a partial hardness in the sense of not being completely blind or hard.

We see this in the book of Acts. The Jews who rejected Jesus completely rejected him. They hated Jesus. They hated the church. They hated Paul. They tried to kill him. They tried to destroy the church. They weren't just a little bit less anxious for Jesus than the Gentiles. It wasn't that they needed just a few more arguments. No. They were violently against the gospel. They actually persecuted those who preached it. So, this partiality here is that a part of the whole has been hardened.

We see this as well in the book of Acts. Paul goes from city to city, and in each instance, the mass of the synagogue rejects him and the gospel and, with varying degrees of violence, drives him out of the town, but you may recall that Acts recounts that in each city there are some Jews who believe. They don't all reject the gospel. There are not usually nearly as many Jews who profess faith as Gentiles in that city, but Paul's point stands here. It is a partial hardening.

The second qualifier Paul uses is temporal. It is time related. He says, "...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." Paul uses this temporal phrase to indicate that the hardening has an end point. Not a complete end point, but an end point of a first stage for the introduction of another stage. Israel is hardened *until* this other thing happens, and then the hardening goes away.

What is the end of this stage? It is the fullness of the Gentiles coming in. This phrase *fullness of the Gentiles* is the same word Paul uses in verse 12 to speak of the full inclusion of Israel. The idea here is that fullness is the opposite of hardening. It is the opposite of rejection. It is the opposite of trespass. *Fullness* doesn't mean each and every person to the last one. It means that whereas in the hardening the bulk disobey and are unbelieving, in the fullness the mass is believing and obedient.

There's a parallel idea here. The Gentiles have been hardened in the time of the Old Testament, and now they are open to the gospel and are rushing into the kingdom. At some point *their* fullness will be seen, and then, just like the Jews are now hardened, at some point later the Jews will have *their* fullness seen. That's what Paul is talking about. This is the culmination of three chapters of Paul's argument.

Who is "All Israel"?

That brings us to the controversial statement in verse 26. "And in this way all Israel will be saved." Now what does Paul mean when he says "all Israel"? There are many different interpretations here. Some of them are unhelpful,

but several have much to commend them, and it is difficult to be very precise or dogmatic about this because there are so many opinions of godly and learned men.

Sinclair Ferguson said when you're trying to interpret something like this, the first thing you should do is find the best interpreter. He said there's a problem. There *isn't* one. He speaks as a man who has 140 commentaries on the book of Romans. He says if you can't find the best interpreter, what you need to do is...we're Reformed...find the most Reformed interpretation. The problem with that is there *isn't* one. There are several.

So what we must do, because there is no unity on this issue, is we must do our best and look for the best option, at the same time being humble and understanding that others of equal piety and learning will disagree. Let's look, then, at three views of "all Israel."

The first view that has much to commend to it is that "all Israel" refers to the combined Jews and Gentiles who are elected by God. This view sees the church as the new Israel. This is indeed a biblical truth. Not so much that the church replaces Israel but that God has one people and that that one people grows out from the Jews to include the Gentiles.

This view is most famously taken by John Calvin. He is especially convinced that when Paul uses *Israel* here in verse 26, he uses it in the same way he uses it in Galatians 6:16. "Peace be upon all those who follow this rule, even the Israel of God." It's clear in Galatians 6 that Paul is not talking about ethnic Israel; he's talking about the church, all who follow by faith.

Calvin puts it this way: "I extend the word *Israel* to all the people of God, according to this meaning—'When the Gentiles shall come in, the Jews also shall return from their defection to the obedience of faith; and thus shall be completed the salvation of the whole Israel of God, which must be gathered from both; and yet in such a way that the Jews shall obtain the first place, being as it were the firstborn in God's family.'"

This view does not see the Jews as a distinct people anymore amongst the peoples of the earth, but rather it sees the church, both Jew and Gentile, as a distinct people. We might put it *this* way: it's not nationality that matters anymore but only whether one is in Christ. Some moderns have mocked this view as replacement theology, as if the Jews were done away with and this were a source of anti-Semitism. "We don't need the Jews anymore. The church has replaced the Jews."

This could not be further from the case. The Jews are not replaced; they are a part of the one people of God, but the character of this one people of God has changed from being only or primarily Jewish to including Gentiles. We talked about this last week when we saw clearly that there is only one people of God, one tree, that God does not have two plans or two peoples.

Now, one note to give us a bit of caution about this view is that when Paul uses the phrase *Israel of God* in Galatians 6, it is unique in its usage. It's not a part of a continued discussion about Israel as it is here in chapters 9-11. So that gives us some pause.

The second view takes the phrase as referring to the total number of elect from among the people of Israel. The point it would have in similarity with the first view is that its focus is with the elect, those who are truly God's people, those whom we can't tell from observation *if* they are elect. The point of difference is that it doesn't refer, according to this second view, to elect Gentiles. It only refers to elect Jews down through the history of the world.

Each generation produces Jews who believe in Jesus Christ, and by definition, those who believe on Christ are elect. This view also has a strong pedigree. Well-known proponents of it are Anthony Hoekema, who has written the book *The Bible and the Future*; Herman Bavinck, the great Dutch theologian; Louis Berkhof, who has written one of the most time-enduring systematic theologies; and William Hendriksen, who is a prolific New Testament commentator. So it has a fine pedigree.

This view closely identifies the "remnant of Israel" that Paul talks about in chapter 9 and at the beginning of chapter 11 with "all Israel" here in verse 26. They are Jews who embrace Christ by faith from each and every generation, from Paul's time through our day, and they will be revealed at the last day. So there is a practical point here. In *this* view, we should not expect to see something in the world that would show all Israel being saved. It would be revealed at the last time when Christ returns and all of the elect are gathered in, and then we will see how many of the elect, if we can put it that way, will have been ethnic Jews.

The third view takes this phrase as referring to ethnic Israel that has generally rejected the Messiah. That is, Israel here are the branches that were broken off in verse 20. They are the ones referred to in the gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 11: Jesus came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. That's who Israel is. It sees that when the full mass of Gentiles has come into the kingdom, then there will be a mass conversion of ethnic Jews who will accept Christ and be saved. They will be grafted back onto the people of God.

In neither case...neither the case of the conversion of Jews nor the conversion of Gentiles...does the fullness mean everyone will be saved. Fullness doesn't mean unanimity. It means a mass. It means a bulk. We might even put it *this* way: more than enough to get our attention. Now, one thing we need to be clear of: just because others take this view in a wrong direction doesn't make it wrong.

The dispensationalists we spoke of yesterday see a future mass conversion of the Jews, but they also see much more in accordance with it. They see the Jews being converted to be a separate people, eternally distinct from the church, to be Israel forever, never a part of the church. There is no continuity between the church and Israel.

They also see this conversion of Jews to come about in a way different than the salvation comes to the church. Salvation will come to all Israel not by faith in Christ but, rather, by obedience to the law. They see the principles of this law as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. You will find writers that will say things like this: "Christians don't need to read the Sermon on the Mount. It's not for Christians. It's for the kingdom of Israel. It's the kingdom ethic for Jews after the fullness of the Gentiles have come in."

Again, none of this is found in the third view I'm describing, but there are similarities, so we can look at this third view and say, "Well, I don't believe in different ways of salvation. Well, I know there's only one people of God. Pastor, you told me there's only one tree." Yes. What I'm saying is that this view is consistent with one way of

salvation, faith in Jesus Christ, one tree, one people of God. Just because someone else takes a road and takes a hard right turn off into the bush doesn't mean the road is going into the bush.

Now what is this view's appeal? The strongest appeal of this view is in chapters 9-11, Paul is continually making reference to Israel. More than 11 times he speaks of Israel, and in every instance, he's referring to ethnic Israel. He is contrasting ethnic Israel with the Gentiles. So it's a very different use of *Israel* than Paul uses in Galatians 6.

Paul has gone to great lengths to show that the hardening of Israel is neither total nor final, that there is something future for ethnic Israel in what God is doing. If we look at verse 26, it would not follow from verse 25 if Paul was not keeping up this distinction between ethnic Israel and the Gentiles. Verse 25 talks about a hardening of Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved.

Paul's point is verse 26 flows out of verse 25. He's describing the difference and the timing, and then he's saying this is when (we can put it this way) verse 12 of chapter 11 will come to pass. The fullness, or the full inclusion of Israel, will come after the fullness of the Gentiles. If the first view is the correct view, why distinguish between Israel and the Gentiles only to bring them back together again? If Paul were referring to the remnant within Israel, as the second view takes, why would he say this is a mystery?

The story of the remnant is all throughout the whole Bible. Paul gave us the story of Elijah, but he could have just as easily given us the story of Noah or the story of Abraham's descendants or the story of Israel or the story of Judah and Benjamin or the story of the return from exile. The entirety of the Bible is about the remnant of Israel who remain faithful to God. So, it doesn't seem that the second view is correct here, because why would Paul reveal this as a great mystery? It's obvious.

Finally, I think what commends this view is that it seems to make the most sense with the immediate citations of the Old Testament that Paul uses in verse 26 and verse 27. Paul does what we've seen him do before that is just wonderful and no one except someone who's writing the Bible can do. He takes part of one verse and part of another verse from different books and mashes them together.

Then he uses the word such that you say to yourself, "Well, *this* verse sounds like that too, and there's this other verse over *here* that's not that different from that." You wind up saying, "Is Paul quoting from Isaiah 59 or is he quoting from Jeremiah 31 or is he quoting from Isaiah 27 or is he quoting from the Psalms?" Do you know what the answer is? *Yes*. He's drawing on all of the Scripture to make this point. This point in the Old Testament is the predicted revival of Israel.

Now, there is one great difference, and this is what I think accounts for the mystery. The Jews always thought they would embrace the Messiah and embrace the kingdom of God, that they would do that first, and then after that the Gentiles would come flooding into the kingdom, but the reality is what Paul is telling us is that the Jews have not accepted the Messiah first; the Gentiles have.

The mystery here, what the Jews didn't understand and now is revealed, is that the Jews are not first into the kingdom but, really, they're second into the kingdom. They have been provoked to jealousy (remember, we saw

this last week) by the conversion of the Gentiles. In any event, we must not think our view is the only possible correct view here.

I've given you what I think are the three soundest views, but it is a truism that the only infallible interpreter of prophecy is history. We have to wait to see God bring it about before we know exactly what was meant. Some prophetic texts are easier to interpret than others. Even Herod's court could figure out the Messiah was going to be born in Bethlehem. They could figure *that* much out, but there was so much they missed until it had already occurred.

We read this morning from John, chapter 2. Jesus prophesied, "Destroy this temple, and I'll rebuild it in three days." Everyone around him said, "How are you going to move all the marble around? Do you know how heavy those blocks are? There's no way you could build this house again in three days." We, on the other side of history, know he spoke of his body as the temple of God and that he would restore it in three days.

What Can We Learn from This?

Well, we've seen why Paul takes this up. We've asked, "Who is 'all Israel'?" Now let's turn briefly to three applications we can get from this passage. What can we learn from this? The very first thing we can learn is about the gospel. What do we learn about the gospel? What we see is that the gospel belongs to God and to God alone. Paul reminds us that right now the Jews are enemies with respect to the gospel. This is what he says in verse 28.

The question comes...*Enemies to whom?* We might first think they are enemies to the church. After all, that's what the book of Acts shows us. Enemies to Paul, enemies to Barnabas, enemies to the Christians. They're actually fighting them. But I think, in line with what we've been seeing here, Paul means something else. He's not worried about himself; he's describing the covenantal nature of God's people to God and the nature of salvation in the gospel.

What he means here is for the sake of the gospel, they are enemies of God. Now why is that? Why are they enemies of God? Well, there's actually a simple answer: because they haven't believed on Jesus. Anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus is an enemy of God. He's that way because of his sin. What that means is we can't think we can be right with God apart from Jesus no matter who we are.

No matter what you have done, no matter how kind and nice you are to people, no matter how open-minded you are, you cannot be the friend of God unless you believe on Jesus. If you have not believed on Jesus Christ, no matter what else you think about yourself or philosophy or the Bible or me, you are the enemy of God. What Paul is telling us is we must believe on Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter whether we are Jew or Gentile, Greek or Roman, Spaniard or Chinese, Japanese or African. We must believe in Jesus.

Paul also says they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. By this he's referring to the patriarchs, specifically Abraham. What he is saying is the promises of God are true not because of the faithfulness of Abraham, not because of the faithfulness of Abraham's descendants, because if it were, everything would be lost. The promises of God in the gospel are true because of the faithfulness of God.

This leads us to the second application about the church. Paul has been going to great lengths to show the unity of the church, that it is made up of Jews *and* Gentiles, and no matter what your view of "all Israel will be saved" is, you have to see that there is one unified people of God. There is really no difference at all among sinners. Paul makes this crystal clear in verses 30-31. He says, "You were at one time disobedient." Verse 31: "So they now are disobedient."

What makes a sinner a sinner is that he is disobedient to God and does not believe in what God has said. It doesn't matter your ethnicity. The only way to be right with God, to be a part of the people of God is to be grafted in, to believe on Jesus Christ as your Savior. What Paul is assuming here is that Jews will be saved in exactly the same way *we* are. So that helps us to see what's going on in the passage.

Finally, we learn something about God's ways. God's ways are not like ours. Who would have thought to so intertwine the salvation of the Jews and the Gentiles in this way? God designed the hardening of Israel so the Gentiles would be saved. We can't be critical of the Jews here, because they were hardened by God as a part of his plan to bring about the salvation of the Gentiles. And who would have designed the fullness of the Gentiles coming in to usher in a revival amongst Israel? God has worked all this out in his plan. There is no part of it that could be left out. It all builds up for his glory.

Finally, we see in verse 32 that God's way is to shut everyone up into disobedience that he might have mercy on all. Now what does that mean? It may help us to understand and see what God is doing with Israel. What it means is that God has not given anyone any possibility of escape from sin other than his mercy. There is nothing we can do to make sin more bearable or more survivable or less condemning. No one can plead that he is different. We are all special cases. We all need the mercy of God.

Paul has culminated his argument in the differences between Jews and Gentiles and the inclusion of both in God's kingdom to show us the power and the glory of God. That's why in the next few verses of chapter 11 Paul breaks out into one of the greatest doxologies of praise in all of the Bible. God would not be defeated by the disobedience of the Gentiles in the Old Testament period, and God would not be defeated by the disobedience of the Jews during the time of the Gentiles. The gospel will never be defeated. In the end, we can all rejoice with the great hymn.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does its successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

Jesus will get all the glory.