

# Gamma

Romans 11:1-36

Study 18 God and Israel

## Case 1

**Gary Low was a young Christian and happen to read Romans 11:7-10 and was very disturbed and questioned how God could be so dictatorial and arbitrary to cause Israelites to not to be able to believe in Him. He gave them a spirit of stupor!!! How can God then turn around and condemn these very same Jews when He is the cause of their non responsiveness**

### **1. How do we answer Gary? Clue look at the word retribution in v 9**

Verse 7 says, “What Israel (meaning Israel as a whole or majority) sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect (meaning Israel’s believing minority). The others were hardened.” It is in 10:3 that Paul tells us what it was that Israel “sought” — righteousness. However, they sought it by establishing their own, rather than receiving it as a gift from God through Christ. (10:3-4)

Here then seems to be the order: *First*, Israel sought the righteousness of God, but when confronted with the choice of getting it by “works” or “gift,” the majority sought it through the former and the “elect” through the gift. *Then* the majority was hardened. I think it is fair to paraphrase Paul in v.7 like this:

“Israel sought the righteousness of God earnestly, but wrongly, except for the elect. As a result, the majority were hardened.”

Therefore the hardening we have here is a “judicial” hardening — a punishment for having a proud heart which rejects the message of grace. Thus in vv.9-10 (quoting from Psalm 69) we see that the “*darkening*” of their eyes is a retribution! A *retribution* is a punishment that exactly fits the crime. Hardening is thus a most fitting punishment for a proud spirit. Pride and self-centeredness leads to a hardness and love-lessness. Though God executes it, it is a natural consequence!

## Case 2

**Jillian Mah was a remarkable young woman brought up to be very spiritually attuned to the people around her. At a very young age she became a Christian through infant baptism as her parents were Christian. She had a great deal of love and zeal for God and went on many trips as a young teenager for projects in disaster relief all over the world. She now works for Doctors without borders after finishing off Medical School in Sydney. Friends from her old church visited her one day and when the conversation turned to Christ she quietly admitted that she cannot possibly agree with the narrow minded doctrines of her parents who think Jesus is the only way to God. There are so many ways to please God and one only has to do what comes naturally to please Him.**

- 1. How is it possible for her to so want to please God that she now rejects Christ's love for her? Look at verse 7 is this a kind of hardening and how has it occurred**

We must remember as well that “hardening” does not necessarily mean bitterness, wrath and hostility toward Christianity per se. It does not necessarily mean *harshness*. A hardened person is someone who is completely obtuse to the gospel of free justification and adoption. Verse 7 thus gives us a picture of a dynamic that can happen today. The amazing concept is this — a person can be trying so desperately (earnestly) hard to please and serve God that he or she comes to vigorously resist the idea of grace. How? Well, you could very easily conclude that God is holy and majestic, and that he cannot abide evil in any way. Therefore, you conclude you must cleanse and purify your heart to approach him. You find any concept of “free total acceptance” as dishonoring to a holy God! “Imagine!” says a person with this view. “The idea that a convicted murderer can just say words of repentance and come right in to God like a person who has worked for years to be good! How illogical! How insulting to the righteousness of God!” You can see the gospel as an insult to the greatness of the Lord.

This is a form of spiritual “judo” done on the heart by sin and the devil. (“Judo” uses the enemies forward motion against him.) It is good to seek God's righteousness, but that eagerness can easily be used to make the gospel seem unworthy of that righteousness. So through a real desire to please God — mixed with an unwitting pride in one's abilities — the heart becomes deeply

allergic and hard toward the mercy and love of God through Christ.

This is the case with many people around the world today. Very sincere Jews and Muslims and Hindus, for example, misguidedly reject the gospel because it seems to weaken the need for moral effort. But inside the church this dynamic is working heavily as well. It can be seen in whole congregations motivated almost completely by fear and guilt and a need for approval.

2. **Jillian shared that it was growing up in her parent's church that she had seen so many hypocrites even leaders who say they love God but when the crunch came never volunteered for any work to help the poor. After that experience Jesus was never real to her any more. She now concentrated on helping the poor because she trust that God will continue to use her as He has so powerfully done so in the past. Her life is pleasing to God whilst the ones in her church are not. What do you think is the spiritual problem with her?**

She may have zeal and love for God but her social endeavours have made her proud. Her pride is based on her performance which is a proxy for her spirituality. She has compared herself to church members and feels she is better than them and the pride has blinded her to the truth.

### **Case 3**

**Bob Kattet was in a Gamma bible study recently and got very confused when he read Romans 11:17-24 because Paul used the metaphor of the Olive tree to warn the Gentiles. The language seemed to imply that he might be in danger of loosing his salvation if he is not careful to walk in faith and fear of the Lord. He pointed out that this clearly contradicted Romans 8:28-38 which guarantees our salvation. How can we reconcile both passages?**

**How can we reconcile both passages?**

This approach to horticulture is a great metaphor for Paul. The "wild olive branch" is a dynamic growing thing, but it only is able to draw life and produce because it is grafted into the tree, from which it draws nourishment. Yet on the other hand, the presence of the branch renews the whole tree, kicking on all its

systems. The application to the Jews is obvious, but in this passage Paul applies the metaphor specifically to “you Gentiles” (v.13).

The Gentiles are warned not to boast (v.18) — to be humble. They must realize that they are the beneficiaries of the Biblical religion of Israel (see 9:1-5). They have been grafted in to the tree of Israel. They inherit the promises given to Abraham because they have the faith of Abraham (9:6-7). But in all this they come in and stand in the flow of Biblical history and promise that comes through Israel. Thus they must not look down on the Jews, but respect them. “You don’t support the root, the root supports you (v.18).” It is most inappropriate for the Gentiles to be disrespectful of the Jews. We have a Jewish Bible and a Jewish Messiah!

The Gentiles are warned not to be arrogant but to be afraid (v.20). Paul shows that some of the natural branches of the tree have been removed because of unbelief (v.20). He calls us to meditate on “the kindness and sternness of God.” His kindness or sternness rest on you depending on whether you disbelieve or believe.

Now it is normal to wonder how this kind of talk squares with all we have heard from Paul in Romans 8 and 9. He said we are only justified believers because we were chosen by grace (8:30-31; 11:5-6). He said that our salvation is certain, that nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from his love (8:38). So why actually warn us to “be afraid.”

The point is that faith is not presumption. Paul’s whole argument about the Jews throughout Romans is: “Though they were the chosen people, they began to think they were the *choice* people. They became confident that they were ‘in’ no matter how they lived simply because they were Abraham’s physical descendants. That is not the case.” So now Paul says, “Don’t anyone fall into the same presumption!” What he exhorts them to is to continue (v.23). The only way we know that God’s sovereign love is upon us is that we *continue*, that we persevere in seeking to be like Jesus. If that “continuing” disappears, if we start to live for ourselves, live in sin, then we will and should begin to wonder if his kindness is upon us, if we were ever chosen.

We must not pit this kind of “exhortation” Scripture against 8:30 “those he justified he *also* glorified” and the many other passages where Paul insists we are safe in his love. I John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they were of us they would have continued with us.” There is no talk of “losing salvation” here — only of the revelation of counterfeits. Hebrews 3:14 is similar: “We have come to share in his life if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As just has been said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...’”

## Question 1

**Look at Romans 11:1 33-36 This is Paul breaking into spontaneous worship! What can we learn about our own worship from this example?**

There are many, many more things we can learn that can be put down here. But here are some ideas:

- A. On the one hand — **there should be no worship without truth.** Paul is quoting Scripture as he praises God spontaneously. In v.34 he quotes Is.40:13 and in v.35 he quotes Job 41:11. Knowing Scripture intimately makes an enormous difference in both the ignition of praise in the heart and in the expression of praise. Many books teach meditation/spirituality techniques that center on “visualizations” of incidents on one’s past or on phrases or images or even on nothing at all. Worship should not come from meditation in general, but through the meditation of Scripture in particular. The Bible must always be the center of any public or private praise and worship.
- B. On the other hand — **there should be no teaching or study of truth without worship.** Paul does not just teach or study doctrinal truth without using it immediately as a basis for the praise of God. He never treats truth as just something to be known or even applied, but as a gateway into praise of God. He uses truth to see God. We are never to study God or the Bible in a detached, cool manner. We must let ourselves be disturbed and comforted and challenged by the truth. We must always allow ourselves to feel its power.
- C. **Doctrines that exalt God lead to the greatest joy.** Paul does not find the deepest impulses for praise in looking at human accomplishments. Praise comes to the degree we see our weakness and impotence and complete dependence on him. In other words, the doctrines of God complete sovereignty in salvation is what leads Paul to the greatest joy and praise. We have never given God *anything* — he owes us *nothing*. These are the ideas that bring Paul the most joy in worship.
- D. Paul does not even get troubled by the parts of God’s ways that he cannot discern or figure out. “how unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (v.33 – King James Version). Many people feel they cannot bow or worship God unless they can understand everything about him.

## Question 2

**We live in a country where the Jews are mainly vilified publically as a matter of policy. War atrocities of the Jews are constantly brought up and those of the others are minimized.**

**A .Should we as Christians support the nation of Israel and defend them even in the public space in our discussions with our neighbors? Does Israel have a right to exist?**

Romans 11 tells us clearly that the Jews as a nation will be saved when the full number of Gentiles have been saved. The actions of the political nation of Israel will have to be judged individually on their own merits whether it is war crimes or self defence. We need to engage our neighbors to treat each one fairly.

I believe the state of Israel has a right to exist and Christians should support this stand rather than take the position of some radicals that they must be wiped out.

Here is interesting article by the Sultanah of Johor

“For so long now most Malaysian Muslims see all Jews as wicked and evil. That is like believing that all Muslims are good when we know some have acted against the very teachings of Islam. Listen to what Rabbi Michael Learner has to say about Muslims, about Israel, about Palestine, about peace, and you will understand that it is wrong to pass judgement on anyone.

And, yes, I do have a few Jewish friends : they have shown me kindness and compassion, especially during my darker days. I am also honoured to have Palestinian friends who have remained brave and are still filled with hope that one day there will be peace in their homeland.

I have lived through the unimaginable as a mother and it has changed me. I now do not care if what I believe in makes me unpopular. What I would like to achieve is to be a good Muslim and a decent human being.”

## Meditation

For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God:severity toward those who have fallen, but God's

kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off

(Romans 11:21-22 ESV)

What wrong attitudes do I need to repent of

What is it in these verses that bring comfort.

What is it in these verses that build me up

Meditate on these for the next week and come back to share with each other how God has spoken to you through the Holy Spirit.