

The Gifts of God Have A Catch

Romans 11:1-2,13-15,28-32 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. . . ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead? . . ²⁸ Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

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Think of a kids bicycle. IF you pedal in one direction the wheel turns and the bicycle moves forward. Based on this information one might assume that if you pedal backwards the bicycle will move backwards. But those of us familiar with this type of bicycle know there is a catch. In most children's bicycles there is a catch that means that when you pedal backwards you engage the breaks. Rather than going backwards both the bike and the pedal stop.

Or you can consider a certain type of pulley, where if you pull one way the object is lifted off the ground, but if you let go there is a catch that stops the object from falling.

Similarly there is a catch in the gospel of God. One might assume that if you have received God's grace freely it might also be taken away. After all this is what our parents taught us growing up. They would give us a computer or bicycle or some other Christmas gift, but a "bike is privilege and not a right." If we misbehaved what was given might be taken or at least confiscated.

But with God it is not so. The calling and gifts of God are irrevocable. They cannot be taken away.

Certainly we can leave God. We can abandon his gifts. But he cannot abandon those whom he has called nor revoke the promises he has made.

He has given us his promises and those promises and that adoption stands. We may indeed abandon him but he will not abandon us. His promises do not go in reverse.

This is the beauty of our baptism. In our baptism we receive the promises of God and once given those promises are ours forever. Those who say that child baptism is not good enough and that another baptism is needed do not understand God's promises. It doesn't matter if we understood the promise when it was given, the promise was given and the promises of God are irrevocable.

This chapter of Romans can be a little confusing. It can be hard to follow Paul's logic. But the key to really understanding him is this truth. God's gifts are irrevocable.

I say then, has God cast away His people?

But now what about the Israelites? If God's promises are truly irrevocable what about the Israelites? Did not God cast them away as his people?

At first glance this whole chapter may seem like it really doesn't have anything to do with us. After all we are not Hebrews. We are not Israelites. Paul and many of the first Christians were so we can understand why it was important to them but why do we care?

Yet actually this question is incredibly important. This question really strikes right at the heart of our faith. We have built our whole lives around the belief that God keeps his promises. That God can be trusted. That God does not abandon his people. In fact the sign outside says "the Lord is our Shepherd." The picture of Christ looking for his lost sheep in one of our favorites pictures

But now seemingly God does abandon his people, for he rejected the Israelites. Now seemingly God does not keep his promises for did he not promise Abraham that he would make his descents a great nation and that he would bless his people forever?

IF God abandoned the Israelites when they were disobedient will he abandon us? He has blessed our nation incredibly. Will he abandon our nation now? Has God cast away his people?

To us it is a most important question not because we are Israelites but because the way that God dealt with them teaches what how we can expect God to deal with us.

Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul gives us the best possible proof that God will not abandon his people, and that we are right when we think of him as our good shepherd.

Paul says, "Am I not an Israelite?"

If God were going to abandon his people would not have Paul been the first to go? Paul when he was still Saul was the absolute epitome of everything that was wrong with the Israelites. He was convinced that he could win heaven by his good works. He rejected Christ. He even persecuted and murdered the church.

Philippians 3:4-6 If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

The fact that Paul who formerly was Saul was a believer is proof that God does not abandon his people, even when they are disobedient. God's gifts and calling are irrevocable.

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew

When Paul talks about those whom God foreknew he is referring back to Romans 8. He is referring to the elect.

Now here we have to be careful because we can easily misunderstand this. It is easy to hear this passage as "God did reject Israel but not those who were chosen." But that is not what Paul says. He is not teaching that God rejected the majority of Israel but only kept a few that he had chosen.

In fact in the verses coming up he is going to argue that the gospel went to the gentiles in order to provoke the rest of Israel to jealousy so that they also might be saved. If God is trying to save them by preaching to the Gentiles then God hasn't abandoned them. He is trying to save them.

The only thing that Paul says in this verse is that God hasn't abandoned those whom he foreknew. He doesn't say that God has abandoned others.

Remember the point that he is trying to make that God hasn't abandoned Israel. So he points first to himself as an example than also to all the other Israelites who were right then members of the church.

"You see," he says, "not only myself but all these others, the elect, are still preserved proving that God has not abandoned his people."

God's does not abandon his people. God's gifts and calling are irrevocable.

For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Again the calling and gifts of God are irrevocable. Having received the promises of God the Israelites still have those gifts and that calling. Even though they have abandoned God, God has not abandoned them. Nevertheless in order to bring them back to himself he has given the same calling and gifts to the gentiles. But now that means the gentiles also have the calling and the gifts, which are irrevocable. So that even if the Jews were to come back that would not mean the gentiles lost anything but only gained.

We can see the truth Paul is talking about here as it played out in Paul's own ministry. Paul as he was directed by God always went first to the synagogue, but most of the time the Israelites rejected the gospel he brought. Thus Paul would go to the Gentiles. You see the Israelites disobedience meant the Gentiles gain. But once Paul went to the Gentiles would it matter at all if then the Israelites heard and repented and came to faith? Absolutely not, for now that they had the gospel they could only rejoice that more were coming to church

So no, God has not abandoned his people. And yes God's promises are irrevocable, once given they are not taken back. Even Paul, who was chief of sinners and the worst of Pharisees, God did not abandon. Even when he sent the gospel to the gentiles he did not abandon Israel but hoped that they would be provoked to jealousy. And having once given to us those promises, they are our forever.

Amen