



Daily Faith Practices

Sunday, August 14-20 (A) – Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Focus: *God's Irrevocable Grace*

word of life

"... for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29 NRSV)

Read Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

The Apostle Paul begins this passage with a pointed question concerning the Jews: "I ask then, has God rejected his people?" (Romans 11:1 NRSV) This is a question which has deep implications for Paul, a Jew since birth. In his writings, Paul proudly claims his Jewish roots, "I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." (Romans 11:2a NRSV)

At first this question might seem abrupt and out of place, but this question is part of the larger independent unit of Romans 9:1-11:36 which reflects on salvation history. Paul is not focusing on individuals, but rather the salvation of Jews and Gentiles.

Just as Paul is not able to disclaim his Jewish connection, so it is with God. Paul cannot imagine God disinheriting the Israelites—those whom God adopted in the first covenant. Despite the Jew's rejection of Jesus and his message, God's adoption holds. Thus Paul asks his question, but offers a resounding response. "I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means!" (Romans 11:1a NRSV)

1. *Does Paul's response to his own question about the Jews surprise you?*
2. *How could Paul write with such clarity and confidence?*

This lectionary passage jumps from verses 1-2a to verses 29-32, skipping over a lengthy commentary about the Gentile's need to improve their attitudes towards the Jews. Then, Paul resumes his reflection about God's acceptance of the Jews, for Paul is convinced God has not forgotten God's own covenant made with them. He writes "... for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29 NRSV). *Irrevocable* is a strong, binding word. Note how God's gifts and calling are a dynamic duo. There is no calling without gifts; there are no gifts without a calling. God will not take back either gifts or calling. God chose the Jews first, electing them for a purpose.

3. *What does the word "irrevocable" mean?*
4. *Why link gifts and calling? Can they be considered separate from each other?*

It might be surprising to hear Paul's reasons behind the Jews rejection of Christ. He writes, "Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy." (Romans 11:30-32 NRSV). Paul argues that the Gentiles have gained because of the disobedience of the Jews. Paul believed God will use the Gentiles to bring the Jews into an obedient relationship with God. This line of reasoning has left some Biblical scholars perplexed.

And yet, the letter to the Romans underscores God's grace extended through Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles. Just as God chose to extend grace to the Gentiles, so God can choose to be gracious to the Jews. God can bring death from life; faith from unbelief. As much as God has been revealed, there is much we do not understand. Paul writes, "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33, 36 NRSV)

5. *Do you agree with Paul? Explain your answer.*

Word among us

Paul writes "...for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:29 NRSV)

What does the word *irrevocable* mean? The root of the word is *revoke* which means to take back or to make null. Thus, *ir-revocable* means the opposite: to never take back or nullify. *Irrevocable* means it is impossible to take back what has already been given.

In the original Greek language the root is *metanoia*, a word which means to repent and change direction. During Lent, people are called to repent and have a change of heart—towards God. It implies an intentional changing of ways to face a new direction.

This word is used in the Old Testament in regards to both humans and God; it leaves open the possibility of God who might change the direction from favoring humanity towards judgment.

1. *What are examples in the Old Testament when God shows favor on humanity?*
2. *What are examples in the Old Testament which demonstrate God changing from favor towards judgment?*

Paul believes God's actions in Christ reflect a change in God's relationship to humanity. God will not allow the rejection by some humans to sway God from extending grace. Paul believes Israel will be saved—not because Israel has acted faithfully, but because God is gracious. "As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:28-29 NRSV)

These words written about Israel have implications for us as well. Paul describes the gifts and calling of God to be irrevocable. Despite a person avoiding God's call or squandering God-given gifts, God chooses to extend grace. And that is unchangeable.

3. *When have you heard the word "irrevocable" used? What is the context?*
4. *What does it mean to you that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Paul viewed the world from his Jewish heritage, but he also looked through the lens of grace as a new creation in Christ. No longer bound by the law, he was set free to receive God's grace and invite others to do likewise. It's difficult to read this passage about the irrevocable quality of the gifts and calling extended by God without reflecting on our own gifts and calling. Even if we have squandered gifts and have run from our calling, God has no intention to take them away that which has been given.

5. *Describe your gifts and calling of God.*
6. *How might the Holy Spirit be stirring you to use your gifts?*

Prayer

Gracious God, help us to understand your vision for us, give us courage to claim our gifts and pursue your calling. Amen.

last word

Spend time this week reflecting on your God-given gifts and calling.

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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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