

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 11:25-36
“It All Ends In Praise”

February 12, 2017
(6th Sunday After The Epiphany)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IVC3, ROMANS 11:25-36 "IT ALL ENDS IN PRAISE"

C3) 11:25-36 DIATRIBE, SCRIPTURE PLUS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

Climax Of Romans 9-11, *For/gar* (vv.25a, 29, 30a, 32, 34)

a) vv.25-27 Mystery: Present Hardening & Future Salvation + 2 Scriptures.

1 Cor. 13:2, Caught Up In Something Bigger Than Us!

25a For I do not want you not to know, brethren, concerning this mystery, //a' vv.33-36, Perpetual Problem
lest you be wise in your own eyes: Disclosure Formula (1:13), Prov. 3:7, Direct Address = 9:2, 10:1, 11:13

Mystery = Secret Salvific Plan Revealed, Not A Puzzle, (16:25-26, Gal. 2:2, 1 Cor. 2:1-7, 4:1)

b 1 'that a hardening has come upon part of Israel, 9:18, 11:11, New Idea! Temporary For Resisters, Thesis + 2 Quotes
c 2 until the full number of the Gentiles (nations) come in, 11:12, Sequence, Mission To The Nations, //1 QSa 1:5-7

26a 3 and so (then) *all Israel will be saved*; 4:17, *All Israel* = (Future) Jews & Gentiles Who Trust God's Display In Jesus
Hardening Hearts, Blinded Eyes, Closed Ears Not Permanent, Mt. 21:31b, 24:14

b as it is written, 2 Texts, 5 Future References (vv.26a-27)

c S1 **"The Deliverer will come out of Zion;** Ps. 13:7 (LXX), Is. 59:20-21(LXX), 1 Thess. 1:10

d **he will banish ungodliness (wickedness, asebeia) from Jacob;** 11:23, 3rd Patriarch, aka *Israel*

Gentile Mission, Then Jewish Inclusion At Parousia/Kingdom

27 S2 **and this will be my covenant with them..."** Is. 59:21a, New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)

"when I take away their sins." Is. 27:9 (pl.), Ungodliness + Sins = Present Unbelief

Link = Sin's Removal By The Deliverer, Paradox Of God's Mercy

b) vv.28-29 Current Relation Of Resistant Jews To Christians, To God: Grounding.

Two Angles Of Vision: The Hardened, Same People

28a 1a As regards the gospel, (Present Situation) Expansion 1 + *For/gar*

b they are enemies, 5:10, 8:7, 11:11, 19, How Appear Because Spurn Trust In Jesus

c for your sake; 11:11-16, In Tension With The Church

b a' but as regards ELECTION (selection) (Ultimate Situation) 9:11, 11:5-7. God's Gracious Choice Is Sure

b' they are beloved, 1:7, //9:13, Of God, Ellipsis

c' for the sake of the patriarchs. 8:32, 2 Kgs. 13:23, Abraham + Patriarchs

1. Assertion (vv.28, 29) 2. Warrant (vv.30-31, 32)

29 2 For the grace gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. //9:4-5. Jdg. 2:1, God's Character, Grounding

Their Response Does Not Undo God's Call

b' vv.30-32 Disobedience And Mercy For Each: Grounding In God's Purposes.

Parity, Reviews vv.28-29

30 1a For just as you were at one time disobedient to God 1:18-32, 6:20-21, Gal. 2:15, Expansion 2 + *For*

b but now have received mercy

because of their disobedience, 9:31-33, 11:11-15, *mercy* (4x). Protasis/Apodosis

31 a' so they have now been disobedient, 10:3, 21, 11:20, 26-27, Dialectic Of History

b' in order that by the mercy shown to you God's M.O. = mercy + grace, not moral performance

they now also may receive mercy. p.v., 9:6b, Past/Present

4:5, All Have Same Problem, Same Solution = An Impartial God

32 2 For God has consigned (imprisoned) *all* men to disobedience, 3:9, 23, Warrant, Grounding/ Sin + Mercy

that he may have mercy upon *all*.' Jews Must Acknowledge This, Inclusive Mercy, Gal. 3:22-23

All (vv.26a, 32[2x], 36), Jews & Gentiles Treated In Same Way

a' vv.33-36 In Praise Of God's Depths: 3 Relations + 2 Scriptures.

Shift To Praise/Worship

Inexhaustible Resources In Revelation, 2 Apostrophes (Exclamations)

33a 1a O the depth of the riches¹/ and wisdom²/ and knowledge³ of God! 2 Statements, 3 Attributes

Wealth/*Ploutos* = 2:4, 9:23, 11:12, We Do Not See!

b b How unsearchable are his judgments (decrees) and how inscrutable his ways! Ps. 36:6, God Is Beyond, Yet Revealed

Two Alliterative Adjectives: *anexareuneta* // *anexichniastoi*

34a 2, SQ For "who has known the mind³ of the Lord?" Is. 40:13 (LXX), *Who* (3x, 3?), 1 Idea, 2 Questions

Or who has been his counselor²?" A: No One! Divine Mind, No Peer, Contrast With Us

knowledge/mind, wisdom/counselor, riches/gift

35 2', SQ "Or who has given a gift¹ to him Uncertain? Job. 35:7, 41:11 (modified)

that he might be repaid?" A: No One! We Do Not Add To God, No Debt, No Deals

Apostolic Awe, God's Otherness, Transcendent, Saving Power

36a 1'a Because from him/ and through him/ and to him are *all* things. Doctrine/End Of Personal Creation, 1 Cor. 8:6, 11:2

Source/Means/Goal, God Is The Origin, Agent, End Of All Things

b b To him be glory for ever (lit. *unto the ages*)! Ascription Of Praise/ Divine Recognition, Shining

c Amen. 2 Statements, 3 Relations, Doxology (11:36b//9:5c), Awesome Otherness

Gentiles Change Religions At Conversion (Many to One), Jews Are Re-centered In Messiah Jesus

Different Words For *Wisdom* (v.25//v.33), *Knowledge* (v.25//v.33) Are // Ideas, Inclusion?

A Brief Treatment Of IVC3. Romans 11:25-36

Our text (C3. vv.25-36) is the **Diatribes + Scripture** section of Panel C. Doxologies (9:5c//11:36b) mark the boundaries of the essay (Romans 9-11) on the relationship of Israel to Scripture, Christ, and Gentiles. The direct address (*brethren*, v.25) is yet another call to attention (11:13a//10:1). The surface structure of vv.25-36 is a 4:2 concentric pattern (a. vv.25-27, b. vv.28-29 // b' vv.30-32, a' vv.33-36), with the parallel ideas of *knowledge* and *wisdom* in the frames (v.25a//v.33a). Dual Scripture quotes in vv.26b-27//vv.34-35 are also inclusions. In the double center (b//b') are two parallel treatments of the current and future status of Gentiles and Jews. Link words are *all* (vv.26a, 32 [2x], 36), indicating that Paul is dealing with wholes (Jew, Gentile) and not individuals, and *mercy* (vv.30-32 [5x]). The use of series of 3 is also noted: 3 statements on *this mystery* (vv.25a-26b), 3 parallel clauses in 2 stanzas (v.28a//v.28b), 3 attributes of God (v.33), 3 statements of God's comprehensive relation to creation (v.36a), 3 rhetorical questions from Scripture using *who* (vv.34a, b, 35). The five futures of God's anticipated and completed action in vv.26a-27 are also notable: *will be saved... will come... will banish... will be... when I take away their sins*.

Paul begins with a statement of purpose (v.25a) that links this thought unit with the preceding unit on the olive tree (11:12-24) with *For/gar*. He uses a disclosure formula, "I do not want you not to know," a fresh direct address (*brethren*), introduces a key word (*mystery*) indicating divine revelation, and warns hearers not to mistake appearances (*wise in your own conceits*) for insight. A *mystery* (Gk. *mysterion*) is a revealed insight into God's secret workings and not based on mere inference from observation. *This mystery* has three movements in sequence: 1) Part of God's people (i.e. Jews who resist trusting Jesus as Messiah) are now hardened and insensitive (v.25b); 2) This diminished status is temporary until the full number of receptive Gentiles enter the family (v.25c); 3) A newly responsive Israel will join the Gentiles on the same basis of grace leading to trust to form an Israel of Jews and Gentiles around Jesus (v.26a). Paul grounds his insight in a composite quote from Is. 59:20-21 and Is. 27:9 arranged in an a-b//a'-b' step pattern in which divine action (a. *The Deliver comes from Zion // a'* to enact his covenant) removes blockages to the relationship (b. *banish wickedness // b'* take away their sins). This is what it means to be *saved* at the end of the age. All who respond are healed, forgiven, and included in God's Israel.

If this is the future, what about the present? The implicit question is answered in the b//b', and in each an assertion (v.28//vv.30-31) is followed by a reason (*For/gar*) grounded in divine character (v.29//v.32). In two stanzas of three lines each (v.28a//v.28b) Paul takes two perspectives on Jews who remain resistant. They now stand opposed to God's good news in Jesus, thus *enemies*; but this is to Gentile benefit, thus *for your sake*. This status is temporary since God will not lay aside his ancient *election/selection* of the patriarchs which is earlier and more ultimate. The *gifts of grace* and *the call* they entail are absolutely secure (v.29). It is in b' vv.30-32 that Paul displays his conviction of creative equal treatment. Disobedient Gentiles now gain access because of Jewish resistance, but their disobedience will one day open them to the same mercy Gentiles received all along; thus, two peoples (Jew, Gentile) will relate to God one way: by mercy and trust, not law and performance. This is grounded in God's knowledge that all are in the same boat and have the same need (v.32). All are incarcerated; all need a pardon.

The final section (a' vv.33-36) merits attention; it is the climax of the essay and formulated with care. The surface structure is a 4:2 chiasm (1ab-2//2'-1'ab) with parallel Scripture quotes at the center (v.34//v.35). The three part acclamation of v.33a (*riches, wisdom, knowledge*) is parallel to the three affirmations of v.36a (*from him, through him, to him*). This is followed, in each case, by praise of God's transcendent *decrees* and *ways* (v.33b) using alliterative adjectives (*unsearchable* = Gk. *anexareuneta*, *inscrutable* = Gk. *anexichniastoi*) and of God's *glory* (v.36b) with a concluding *Amen*. Quotes from Is. 40:13 (v.34) and a paraphrase of Job 41:3a (v.35) ground the assertions of v.33 in Scripture. The three *who* questions (*For... Or... Or...*) teach that God has no peer who knows the depths of the divine mind (v.34) and that God needs nothing and so is indebted to none (v.35). All is his, and his is all glory (v.36).

IT ALL ENDS IN PRAISE

“For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable.

Good news for fickle humans.

R O M A N S 1 1 : 2 9

When first I saw his photograph on the cover of *Time* magazine, or was it *Look*, I— a boy of seven or eight— wondered why the old man with sticking up hair did not see a barber, or else buy a brush and some Brylcream. And when I asked my dad when he came home for lunch, “Who is this?” his answer was, “Son, that’s the world most intelligent man, Dr. Albert Einstein; he died in 1955, two years after you were born.”

“Why is he so famous?”

“Well, he’s the world greatest physicist. He wrote equations on long blackboards at Princeton that some say explain nearly everything, and to him we credit the *Theory of General Relativity* which helps us see the world a whole new way. No Einstein, no atomic bomb!”

“Wow!”

“Wow is right. He ranks with Copernicus who re-centered our solar system, with Newton who wrote the equations for gravity and Kepler for planetary motion.”

“How do you know so much?”

“Well, I’m a scientist.”

“What do you mean? I thought you were a doctor?”

“Physicians are practical scientists. And also, I read a lot after you go to bed at night. A broad general knowledge is the mark of an educated man, and it helps build bridges to people, and I do that every day.”

The history of science is a history of model making. A theory is formed and tested for explanatory power. If it works, it become the norm for a season, the way things are now *seen to be*. Evidence continues to be uncovered which

Romans 11:25-36. 5

confirms or else disconfirms the model to such a degree a new model must be put forward, and these we call *scientific breakthroughs*.¹ A scientist has a insight which casts the pattern of evidence in a new light. In a dream or daydream, or perhaps in a conversation, an insight comes, “I wonder if?”

The Big Bang is such an example. Matter and space and time and motion are not eternal but came into being at a singularity when a cosmic fuse was lit. It was first proposed in 1927 by Father George Lemaitre, a Catholic priest and professor of physics. And for Jews and Christians with our distinctive doctrine of creation, or— as Paul put it in verse 36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things,” science is about exploring the designs of the Great Designer. They uncover what’s there and thus increase our understanding of the world and ourselves. They create nothing; they explore everything, and an invisible Someone has hidden clues everywhere! And so my hat is off to Einstein the non-conventional Jew who helps us appreciate anew the complexity and elegant beauty of our world at a deeper level. He looked over God’s shoulder, so to speak, and transcribed several of his simpler equations, even if his understanding of God was non-traditional and is still debated because he made some contradictory statements along the way.

It was time for some hidden things to be seen, for God to tip his hand on a few secrets, and Einstein was the vehicle of the scientific revelation that birthed a permanent revolution. Such is the providence of God, that he blesses the world even through those who do not acknowledge him since all truth is God’s, first to know and then to show to curious seekers.

On January 3, 1954 Dr. Einstein penned a letter to philosopher Eric Gutkind who’d sent him a copy of his book *Choose Life: The Biblical Call to Revolt*. The letter went on public sale a year later and remains in private hands today. And in his letter the great man is direct:

"The word *god* is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable,

¹ The classic treatment is Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, ILL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012).

but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can (for me) change this."

Einstein, who declined an offer to be the state of Israel's second president, also rejected the idea that the Jews are God's favored people and wrote:

"For me the Jewish religion like all others is an incarnation of the most childish superstitions. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong and with whose mentality I have a deep affinity have no different quality for me than all other people. As far as my experience goes, they are no better than other human groups, although they are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power. Otherwise I cannot see anything 'chosen' about them."²

I guess if you are this good at science, it's easy to dismiss evidence that is not amenable to the scientific method and cannot be reduced to equations. It's the only kind of knowledge you really respect because it's vetted and verified. But Maslow was right when he quipped, "To him who is good with a hammer, everything is a nail." So we should be grateful for the great scientist, for the gift he was and the gift he received, even if he did not know from whom it came. The flash of insight was grounded in years of careful work, but it came from outside the man. So get your physics and elemental cosmology from the very best, but you may want to look elsewhere for answers to questions they cannot answer, like: Is there a God? What is God's character? Has God chosen a people to be his showcase? How am I to be put right with God, knowing something is wrong with me and wrong with my world? Very important questions these are, but not any of them have scientific answers.

Other minds, as great as his but in other disciplines, have formulated answers to such non-scientific but deeply pressing human questions, and they too do it on the basis of trusting where the evidence leads and where the light beckons. Fundamental true insights, in science and theology, have the same source, and both yield fresh understanding, science of the Design and biblical

² James Randerson, "Childish superstition: Einstein's letter makes view of religion relatively clear," www.guardian.co.uk (5-13-08).

Romans 11:25-36. 7

theology of the Designer. God is not an object within the universe to be examined in a laboratory. God cannot be measured. That is not what it means to be God. God is *holy*; God is unique; God is other; God just is, or as Moses heard, “I am who I am.” And if God did not self-reveal, we’d know nothing.

And so we turn from a modern to an ancient genius, from a writer of equations to a writer of Scripture, from one who thought both God and the chosen people are myths to one who could not deny either. The Apostle Paul had also received an insight and saw into previously hidden things, matters that he labeled— in technical language— a *mystery*, meaning plans and purposes only God can reveal because they cannot simply be read off the surface of events.³

The living and true and only God, the Creator, the maker of the Jews and their peculiar history, has opened his heart to the world in Jesus the Jew and in the Holy Spirit so that the one God of Israel— *Yahweh, the Lord*— must now be named in a Triune fashion as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this wonderful, mysterious, self-existent, transcendent and yet revealed tri-personal God, with power and wisdom and knowledge and love the depths of which we cannot sound, is at work in history to set thing right again and to have himself a people who trust him, Jew and Gentile together around a new center. That’s the biggest and final goal of it all. Not around Temple and Torah and Land and strict obedience to the Law as before, but now around a crucified and resurrected person who’s come to our common rescue, Jesus Christ.

The trustworthy God is building himself a trusting people on whom to shower his love and through whom to develop the whole of creation in his coming kingdom, and the great news is that all who will can get in on it now if they lay aside all hopes of getting it right or being worthy or having anything to contribute but their need to be rescued. Admission is only for those who say, with God’s aid, “I entrust myself to You because of what you’ve shown me in Jesus Christ. I’m yours; I surrender; I lay down my armed resistance and furl my flag of independence; do with me as you will.” But what an agony!

³ On Paul’s understanding of *mystery*, see Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 416-417; Charles Talbert, *Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 263-264.

Romans 11:25-36. 8

God needs nothing from us; God is eternally happy within the perfect love and communion of the Holy Trinity⁴ because that is what the world *blessed* means— no lack whatever, but we need God. God did not create the world and us because he was lonely; what a bunch of psycho-babble rubbish; God created to share love and create a family; it was an overflow, not a self-help project! This great God is the only one who can save us and heal us and restore us and forgive us and bring us home to himself, and that is the project written deeply into the life of Jesus. I love the story Pastor Lee Eclov tells:

“My friend Linda's cat escaped. It was cold and rainy, and that cat would not come home. Not for three days! The cat wasn't lost; Linda knew where it was— 20 feet up a tree right in the back yard. But the little critter would not come down. A friend named Jim took a long extension ladder over and called for my expertise, which is ladder-holding in the rain. It was cold and scared, but when Jim finally got up there, the cat was not glad to see him, downright hostile. The only way Jim got the cat down was to put a towel over its head and pry its claws out of the tree. Jim did all the rescuing. All the cat did was finally let go of the tree.”

He then adds: “Salvation is often a lot like that; it’s when we finally let go. And none of us can look to Jesus, remembering our rescue, and say, ‘We made a good team, didn't we!’”⁵ And that is precisely Paul’s message.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

For three involved and complex chapters now, Romans 9 through 11, the mind and heart of Paul have been brooding over and making a case from Scripture and his missionary experience for how God is working to offer a new deal in Jesus to all people in two large groupings: 1) to his special people the Jews, the insiders, and 2) to everyone else— the Gentiles, the nations, the pagans and the

⁴ For an accessible treatment, see Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), Chapter 6, “In The Beginning,” 43-46.

⁵ Edited from PreachingToday.com search under Romans 11:25-36.

Romans 11:25-36. 9

polytheists, outsiders who have only hints and glimmers of the true God. Even God has to start somewhere if he's going to reach everywhere, and where he started was with an old man from Iraq, Abraham, and his too-old-to-have-a-baby wife Sarah. And in the paragraph before us, Paul's presentation comes to a carefully argued close.

There are some things I cannot deny, things that are properly basic, like the foundation of a house. I cannot deny I am a thinking, feeling, acting person and that I am not you. I cannot deny I am male and that half the human race is a delightful mystery to me, starting with Lori— my nearest neighbor. I cannot deny I am shaped and constrained by my particular historical location. I cannot deny that my choices are free within limits, and I cannot deny that my choices have consequences as one set of options open up and another close down in a complex web of possibilities. I am constrained, but I am not strictly determined; I have a purpose, but there is no blueprint; the future is partly open. I cannot deny that I have a conscience or that happiness and fulfillment are my goal. I also cannot deny that at my deepest level— in my heart— I'm a battleground between good and evil, as I suspect is true for all others as well. I long for unity, but I have a deeply divided nature that is prone to vice and deception and taking self-serving short cuts. I also cannot deny, on a different front, that I believe in the Trinity and in the Incarnation, that God is tri-personed, and that in the risen Jesus I meet God, not a junior ambassador, but the Creator come near and making an ultimate claim on my life. I cannot deny that death is ahead, and that unless someone much stronger carries me through it, I am done! I would love to hear your lists of *undeniables*, but this is my current catalog, my canon.

And so with Paul; there were some things he could not deny, that were properly basic and from which he reasoned. That the Jews were God's great project, and that he was one of them, caught up in a messy, historical experiment. They had been elected and selected; there's no going back. That Jesus was God at ground level, the Son sent as a revealer of just how trustworthy the Father was and just how far he'd go— all the way to a cross and into a borrowed tomb and out the other side— to open a new way home based on grace and trust, not law and performance. That the risen Jesus, whom he rudely

Romans 11:25-36. 10

met on the way to Damascus,⁶ wanted his story told to all the world. And finally, though some had, the majority of his fellow Jesus *just didn't get it*. With all their treasures of divine revelation,⁷ they missed the Messiah because he asked too much and didn't match the expected profile, particularly the death on a cross part. He looked like a colossal failure! So they clung to Torah and Temple and Traditions of being right with God through the Law and missed the One they claimed to be waiting for, which ought to be a warning to us all about the blinding effects of religious privilege. Could it be that church and synagogue with their rituals and traditions are the last place to hide from God, and to substitute these for a risky, messy, unpredictable relationship based on nothing but trust? Yes it is possible, then and now. And Paul explained the resistance of his Jewish tribe by noting its consequences: hard hearts, deaf ears, blind eyes, as if a veil has descended over their spiritual senses rendering them insensitive and unaware.⁸

Now this was not true of all because some Jews were still placing their trust in Jesus and finding their old faith dramatically re-centered in him, but most were not, while Gentiles were flooding in. Something had flipped. Outsiders are now insiders, and insiders are mainly— and sometimes violently—resistant. So what's God up to? What's the secret? What's the key to making sense of all this? Has God abandoned his resistant people for receptive pagans? Are the Jews done? No, it's more subtle than that, but the shift is dramatic. And so Paul has an answer to give, and here he makes a claim to divine revelation, to an insight God showed him and other apostles, *the mystery* he called it, and here is how he introduces it in verse 25, “For I do not want you not to know, brothers and sisters, concerning *this mystery*, lest you be wise in your own eyes,” relying only on surface appearance and not understanding the deep intent. He wanted his Roman hearers to understand what was going on in their midst, precisely so they could cooperate with it in wisdom.

⁶ Acts 9:1-31.

⁷ 9:4-5, Judges 2:1.

⁸ 11:7-10. 2 Cor. 3:12-18.

Romans 11:25-36. 11

As Paul observed what was going on in the churches, examined the Scripture for precedents, prayed and consulted others, a powerful insight came, something not seen before— an *aha!* a *eureka!* an *I see it now!* moment— and it came with the force of a divine illumination, not something Paul could have figured out on his own because the evidence was just too puzzling. What was needed was a new idea, a deeper insight, a new pattern to unlock *the mystery*, a break though, a paradigm shift, and we know it came because Paul wrote about it in today’s text. His claim, offered up for testing to the community, is that there is a surprising order and timing in offering the good news of Jesus— the gospel— to the world.

The traditional expectation was that at the end of the age all the Gentiles would make a pilgrimage to God’s people and God’s temple and God’s city to learn of the true God from the Jews.⁹ But here is the surprise of God’s grace hidden in God’s *mystery*. The majority of Jews, having resisted and missed the Messiah, are now disabled in spiritual perception, and in their place Gentiles are flooding in; and when that cup is full to overflowing, the veil will be lifted, and all Jews who are receptive will join them; they will have a second chance as a whole people. Paul lays it out in three lines:

“that a hardening has come upon part— though not the whole— of Israel,/ until the full number of the Gentiles come in,/ and so all Israel will be saved.”

Receptive outsiders now, resistant insiders later on, and for two reasons: 1) God has not abandoned his chosen, and 2) the Israel of God will be a unity of Jews and Gentiles re-centered in Jesus. What it means for both groups equally is that God will take the initiative to *fix us once and for all* by removing the historic blockages to an open, free relationship with himself. And here Paul draws on two texts from Isaiah, that *The Deliverer*— here the risen Jesus— will suddenly appear to complete in us what he earlier began, which is to clean us up, “he will banish wickedness from Jacob,” and to lift off of us the guilt and penalty of sin, “when I take away their sins,” so it never returns. Now we have

⁹ Samples are Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-5, Tobit 13;11-13, T. Ben. 9:2.

forgiveness, but then, as King said, we shall be free at last!

We have part now, then the fullness. God is going to fix us and in the process set all things right, and that will be the kingdom of God ushered in when Jesus comes to assume full rule. It's a doorway into a reality beyond imagination. And the way we are drawn into the operations of the new reality is by placing our full trust in Jesus Christ, which means he's worth following and understanding and obeying now, and the name for that is *discipleship*, which means doing life with Jesus at the center and in the company of his other followers.¹⁰ We follow the one we trust, and we do it together!

And if that's the glorious future, what about the messy present? And to that Paul returns at the double center of the paragraph after giving us the magnificent conclusion at the start. The current situation is the most Jews resist what the church claims about Jesus and so are opponents, *enemies* to use a stronger word, but then their resistance is precisely the response God used to keep the new faith from becoming an in-house, private, Jewish affair and so thrust the church out to the nations. But their long term prospects are bright because God has not forgotten and will keep the original promises made to Abraham and his offspring. To us at ground level they appear as temporary *opponents* because we disagree over Jesus, but to God they never ceased to be *beloved* because his *gifts and call* are utterly reliable and will bear fruit. To give up our respectful witness to Jews about their Messiah— even after the Holocaust and the church's complicity— is a loss of theological nerve, as has recently happened officially with the German state church, but it is

¹⁰ Recent treatments include Preston Sprinkle, *Go: Returning Discipleship To The Front Lines Of Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016); Brian Harrington & Josh Patrick, *The Disciple Makers Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2017), and the earlier classic, Bill Hull, *The Complete Handbook of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006). A recent assessment is *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators* (2015), <https://resources.barna.org/products/state-of-discipleship>.

shortsighted.¹¹ There is no independent path to being right with God apart from Jesus Christ, since he is intrinsic to the divine life as the Son of the Father and the giver of the Spirit.

And there is, as Paul discerns, a deep symmetry in God’s dealings, as unfolded in verses 30 and 31. Gentile outsiders, long disobedient and ignorant of God in their polytheism, paganism, immorality and spiritual darkness, have now received mercy in Jesus because the church came to them when the Jews threw up barriers. But then, at the end, the disobedience of God’s own in resisting the Messiah will also be overcome by the same mercy God gave the needy Gentiles, and so all are in the same fix of disobedience and so need the same help, as Paul states in verse 32 using incarceration imagery, “For God has *consigned* all men and women to disobedience” (i.e. all in the same bondage of sin), and why is that? So that he might justly and rightly offer the same healing to all in Jesus Christ, as Paul states, “that he may have mercy on all,” though not all Gentiles or all Jews respond in trust. This is not universalism, the false hope that all will be saved, but it is a universal condition of sin and a universal offer of mercy, to which a saving response is *trust* and a damning response *distrust*, un-faith, dis-belief, mainly— I suspect— because I do not want to humble myself to admit either my need or God’s way of dealing with it through the career of Jesus from virginal conception through life into death and resurrection and return and rule. To say, “I don’t have such a need; I surely don’t need such radical help; I’m doing quite fine on my own,” is a lie, a sure sign of a toxic brew of pride and unbelief cooking away in your soul, and we know who’s stirring the pot and keeping the fires lit. The Deceiver.

So this is the secret, the divine mystery now revealed in Jesus and the good news deposited in the church. All are in the same mess; the same cure is offered to all in Jesus the Jew, but there is an order based on receptivity: the Gentiles and a few Jews now, a flood of Jews later when the veil is lifted and a fresh offer of mercy made. How brilliant of God to reclaim his own and all comers on the same basis, trust or distrust in the One he sent, Jesus the Jew.

¹¹ Tom Henegan, “German Protestants officially renounce converting Jews to Christianity,” religionnews.com/2016/11/17/german-protestants-officially-renounce-converting-jews-to-christianity.

Have you ever been so grateful your heart was about to burst? I felt that way when— after a pause of several days— Lori said Yes to the offer, “Will you marry me?” I felt it again at my ordination, at the births of Daniel and Ellen, at their baptisms when first I introduced them formally to the Savior.

There have been others, and in such moments the most natural response is gratitude and praise because of the deep, sweet goodness of it all, the glimpse of a lost bright world and a hope for its return. And when Paul reflects on the revealed mystery, the deep secret of how God saves his own and at the same time welcomes all the world in Jesus, what can he do but compose a tribute of praise and poetry and Scripture and theology and wonder at God’s incomparable greatness, the divine height and the divine depths that are never exhausted and yet always calling for further exploration.

God’s wisdom and knowledge, the understanding of all that is and how it works is God’s alone, and *O the depths of the riches!* The archives of his degrees so vast and beyond us as to be *unsearchable*, his wise ways beyond mapping. And while the center of the divine life is revealed in Jesus so that we can know and rely upon it, the mind of God is beyond us; he doesn’t need our advice or gifts because God is in debt to none. All things originate with God, are carried through by God, and find their proper end in the same. And so Paul ends with a shout of praise, “To him be glory forever. Amen.”

CONCLUSION

In his book *Vanishing Grace*, Philip Yancey shares a story about a World War II veteran, currently serving as a pastor, who participated in the liberation of Dachau. As U.S. soldiers marched through the gates, nothing could prepare them for what they found in the boxcars. The future pastor said:

“A buddy and I were assigned to one boxcar. Inside were human bodies, stacked in neat rows like firewood. Most were corpses, but a few still had a faint pulse. The Germans, ever meticulous, had planned out the rows— alternating heads and feet, accommodating different sizes and shapes of bodies. Our job was like moving furniture. We would pick up each body— so light!— and carry it to

a designated area. I spent two hours in the boxcar, two hours that for me included every known emotion: rage, pity, shame, revulsion—every negative emotion, I should say. They came in waves, all but the rage. It stayed, fueling our work.

Then a fellow soldier named Chuck agreed to escort twelve SS officers in charge of Dachau to an interrogation center nearby . . . A few minutes later we heard machine gun fire. Soon Chuck came strolling out, smoke still curling from the tip of his weapon. ‘They all tried to run away,’ he said with a leer.”

When Yancey asked if anyone reported what Chuck did or took disciplinary action, the pastor said:

“No, and that's what got to me. It was on that day that I felt called by God to become a pastor. First, there was the horror of the corpses in the boxcar. I could not absorb such a scene. I did not even know such Absolute Evil existed. But when I saw it, I knew beyond doubt I must spend my life serving whatever opposed such Evil— serving God.

Then came the incident with Chuck. I had a nauseating fear the captain might call me to escort the next group of SS guards, and an even more dread fear I might do the same as Chuck. The beast that was within those guards was also within me.”¹²

We all have a very big problem, the worst and the best alike. The beast is in us all, but God has provided a very big, competent, and fully vindicated Savior. He is for all; his name is Jesus the Jew, and he’s not a dead hero to be admired but very much alive in order to be trusted and followed. Will you trust him so that he may begin the great work in you and then through you across the street and around the world. This is true Christianity, and it will end in praise.

¹² Edited, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014, 63.
