



All parents of young children share a common experience. At least once a day, inevitably while you are busy making dinner or busy with something, you hear a blood curdling scream from the next room. You know right then that your children are engaged in another epic struggle for survival. After all, the toy room is not infinite. It has limited resources. There's probably only one Thomas the Tank engine and both kids want to play with it right now. There may be fifty thousand Lego pieces sprawled out on the bedroom floor, but there's only one dark blue piece with that fancy hinge. And that just so happens to be the piece that is so desperately needed to complete the coolest Lego spaceship ever built. Moms and dads--can you relate?

Assuming you stay relatively calm, you see this as another painfully obvious teachable moment. And what is it you want to teach them right then? To share, of course. "Laura, you can have Thomas the Tank for the next 30 minutes and then it's your brother's turn, OK?" But a good parent doesn't want to just solve the argument. He wants to go deeper than that. What is the core issue here? Pride, ultimately. Selfishness is self--centeredness which is a form of pride. Little Joey thinks that the world revolves around him and his awesome Lego spaceship. He's still a child, so it's expected, but mom and dad have to teach him what it means to share and why it is important.

Romans chapter eleven is very much about sharing and the problem of pride. The Gentile believers in Rome had a theological deficiency and a pride problem. Look at the warnings that Paul wrote to them.

- *20 So do not become proud, but fear.*
- *22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God*
- *25 Lest you be wise in your own sight*

I am telling you from the start of this message. The book of Romans is not the easiest of books and this chapter is one of its most challenging sections. But I wanted to give you something on which to hang your hat as we dig into it. There is a moral problem--pride--which has a

theological answer. Of course everything has a theological answer, doesn't it? But this is more than knowing something but not doing it. The Gentile believers really needed to understand the Masters' Plan for salvation of the world so that they could correct their pride problem. And as always, this was not just meant for them, but we need to know and act on these truths as well.

It's a longer passage so let me take it a section at a time. We left off last week with the fact of God's hardening human hearts. But I also told you that this hardening has end, which is exactly how Paul starts this section.

11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

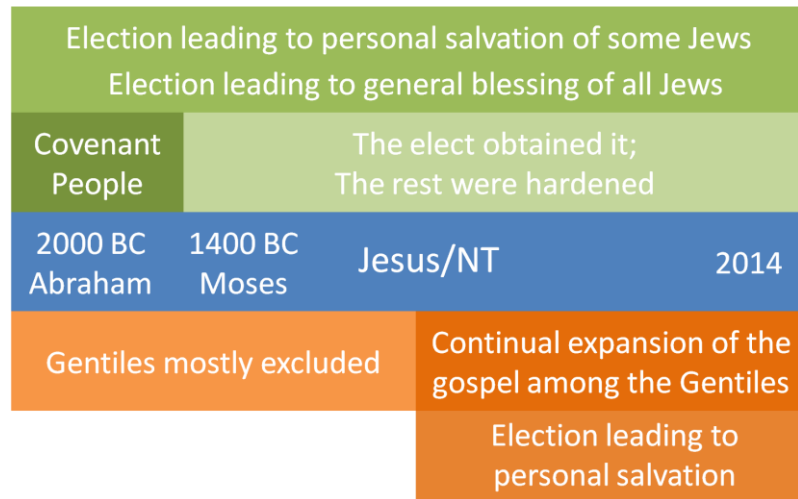
13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

So the Jews have been hardened for a season. Actually, a very long season. Do you recall how long? Moses first wrote of this hardening, then Isaiah, then Jesus and finally Paul chimed in. Since the hardening over the Jews still seems to be in effect today, this means that the Jews have been in this state of hardening for the past 3,400 years.

Now some of you are thinking, "Hang on. Didn't you tell us last week that God does not harden groups of people but only individuals? How can you now be saying that the Jews have been hardened for the past 3400 years?" That's an excellent question. I'm glad you asked! ;-) What I did say is that God does not harden groups of people meaning the entire group all together. And it's obvious that this is true. Otherwise Paul would never have become a Christian and there'd be no such thing as Messianic Jews today. The Jews have not been hardened or cut off completely but they have been at least "partially hardened" as Paul states in verse 25. *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*

This is what I mean by "sharing." Throughout the Old Testament, which group of people had access to God--Jews or Gentiles? Both, really, but we know that God chose the Jews to receive his covenant and to literally be his covenant people--the people of his promise. Unless a Gentile happened to be in close proximity and could convert from their paganism to Judaism, they were outside the realm of salvation. At least that is what we know from the Biblical record. Therefore, in this sense, God did not equally "share" his truth with the Gentiles, did he? They were largely excluded. But even then, as we saw last week, the Jews were already experiencing a partial hardening from the time of Moses until today.

But ever since the death and resurrection of Jesus, the gospel has been continually expanding among the Gentiles. At first, one could say it was the Jews "turn" to receive the good news but for the past 2000 years it the Gentiles have had their "turn." This is what I mean by "sharing," but this so-called sharing this is the very thing which caused pride among the Gentile believers. Just as the Jews thought they were special and looked down upon the Gentiles under the old covenant, so the Gentiles began to see themselves as superior to the Jews and looked down upon



them from their lofty heights. What both groups always missed is that they both experienced grace. Neither group was deserving of this wonderful mercy from God.

Let me show you what this looks like using a timeline of history. The blue line is just the basic facts of history from Abraham in 2000 BC to today. Starting with Abraham, the Jews (dark green) became God's covenant people. Did this happen because they

were more righteous than anyone else? No. This too was all grace. The Jews experienced both types of election. They experienced a general election of all Jew simply by virtue of being a Jew. And some Jews experienced the specific election which led to their salvation, but the rest were hardened.

Up until the time of Christ and the birth of the church, the Gentiles (light orange) were largely excluded from salvation. The occasional Gentile did experience true saving grace, such as Rahab, the harlot from Jericho and Ruth the Moabite widow, but most did not. But since then, the gospel has spread among the Gentiles continually (dark orange) and with much greater fruit than among the Jews. This is often called "salvation history" and you can also see that it is progressive. Jesus could have come the day after Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, but he didn't. Instead God progressively revealed both himself and his salvation through the promises given to Abraham, through Law given through Moses and finally and ultimately through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But he has not only revealed himself through the ages but he has revealed himself in different ways and differing amounts over this time. The Jews got "more" of God at first and now the Gentiles have received "more" of him. Individuals from both Jew and Gentile have always been saved by grace through faith, but God has treated both groups very differently. It hasn't been "equal," has it? Can you see that there is something happening here which goes way beyond just a personal response to God? I have attempted to signify this difference through the use of different colors and a quick glance at it shows the uneven nature of God's salvation. As a group, the Jews have been hardened, even though some have been elect. And as a group, God has released the gospel much more freely and fruitfully among the Gentiles. The Bible tells us that it is different and all of our experience up until this very day has confirmed this different treatment.

Buy why has God done this? Why is has he treated the two groups--Jews and Gentiles--so vastly different since the beginning of time? This morning and next Sunday I will give you seven reasons why he did.

1. To show that he is faithful in his promises and steadfast in love. God doesn't always explain everything he does but Deuteronomy 7 sure fills in a lot of questions.

“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Ok, up to this point we don't yet have an answer. God said that he brought them out of Egypt to show that he is keeping his promises, but why did he choose the Jews in the first place? Here's our answer.

9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations (Deuteronomy 7:6-9).

God wants to be known as a covenant keeping God who shows steadfast love. He chose the Jews to be the recipients of his promises and love and even though he never fully explains his answer, the big idea here is to show that he is faithful in his promises and steadfast in love. This is exactly how the saints in the Old Testament addressed the Lord.

Solomon-*Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, and said, “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart. (1 Kings 8:22-23).*

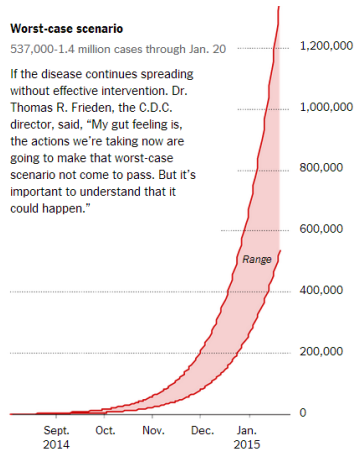
Nehemiah-*And I said, “O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments (Nehemiah 1:5).*

Daniel-*I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments (Daniel 9:4).*

2. So that he would get the glory and not us.

26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Young people and young believers often wonder why God is so concerned about receiving glory. I mean, if *we* did that, it would be the height of arrogance and boasting, right? How can it be bad if we do it but it's good when God does it?



Let me give you an illustration from the Ebola crisis. We all know that the Ebola virus has been spreading in epidemic proportions. Up until this outbreak, no more than a few hundred people have ever died from the virus in one outbreak. But assuming the numbers are accurate, we are already up to 3400 deaths. If this worst case scenario comes true, there could be up to 1.4 million cases of Ebola by January.¹ By the way, I am not trying to cause you more anxiety over the topic of Ebola. There has only been one death in the U.S. and this man came from ground zero in Liberia. To put this in perspective, the flu virus will take somewhere between 10,000-20,000 lives in the U.S. alone this year.

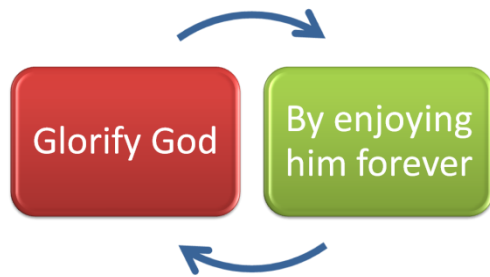
So far, no one has developed an effective vaccination or cure for Ebola. But let's say that someone did. Just for fun, let's say that some Jewish scientists developed a foolproof vaccine for Ebola. At the same time, a big pharmaceutical company also claimed to have developed a foolproof vaccine. The problem is, their vaccine doesn't actually work yet since they have deep pockets and a reputation in the medical field, countless people are getting their "fake" vaccine and overlooking the one that works. Would you accuse the Jewish scientists of being boastful and arrogant if they did all they could to promote their vaccine? What if the Israeli government backed this real vaccine with \$50 billion in advertising and promotion? Would you think that they were being prideful to talk so highly of their product while also trying to warn people of the fake vaccine? No, you wouldn't, because if you knew the truth, you would see this as just a brute fact. One vaccine works and the other is a pretender.

It would be a good thing for the Israelis to "boast" about their vaccine because it might save millions of lives. And note that there's a little bit of selfishness or self-protection built into this boasting. Ultimately, if news about the Israeli vaccine spreads, more lives will be saved. In other words, the more glory the creator of the vaccine receives, the more human lives are impacted for good.

How much more is it right to boast about and glorify the Creator, Sustainer and Savior of the world? Not only is it a brute fact that he is the real thing and not a pretender, but the more he is glorified and boasted about, the better it is for us. It is better for us because salvation is found in him alone. It is better for us because if we obey his commandments, ultimately we will be happier, healthier and probably longer lived. It is better for us because the bigger God is in our own eyes, the more enjoyment we gain from him. He is, after all, the greatest gift he could have given us. he cannot give us something greater than himself

This is the reason for the first question in the [Westminster Catechism](#).

Q. What is the chief end of man?



A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Many of you are familiar with the way that John Piper slightly altered version. The chief end of man is to glorify God *by* enjoying him forever. If you say it the way the catechism puts it, glorifying God and enjoying him seem like 2 different things, like two unrelated points on a list. But if you say we are to glorify God by enjoying him forever, you immediately see how

interconnected and dependent these two phrases are on one another. As I glorify him and boast about him and marvel in him, my enjoyment of him increases. And as my enjoyment of him increases, he is given more glory.

So what God did was to take a nobody-one of Shem's sons, a man named Abram living with pagans in a pagan land. He chose him out of every other descendant of Shem and out of all of Ham's and Japheth's descendants--all of the Gentiles. He chose the weakest and smallest among them, for no reason other than his sovereign mercy, and built them into the nation of Israel. He did this so that he would get the glory and not us.

3. So that the gospel would spread to the entire world through the Gentiles.

The Jews were given a very special place in God's economy. From the time of Abraham to the time of Christ, God's mercy in the world was not evenly distributed. But then a God-sent hardening came upon the Jewish people, which is so clearly summarized in verse 25-*a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*. God had always planned to have the gospel spread to all nations. Please do not see this as a change in plans or new idea. It was just part of the Master's Plan and all in his perfect timing.

So God hardened the Jews to allow the Gentiles their "turn" as it were. And this is exactly what has happened. The gospel has spread to the Gentiles throughout the world. This is how Paul described it in chapter 15. *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy* (Romans 15:8-9).

The second half of the verse is most relevant to this point- *in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy*. If you sit here as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you should be glorifying God for his mercy. This should be the driving force in your life. But did you notice the first phrase? *in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*. That brings us right back to point #1-To show that he is faithful in his promises and steadfast in love. God is a covenant keeping God. He did keep his covenant with the Jews and he will fulfill it to the end.

Let me leave you with a warning and some encouragement. We are working our way through a tough chapter in Romans. Even though I am in the middle of giving you seven reasons as to why God is working out his salvation, these can be the kinds of questions that leave some doubt. First the warning.

Just this week I read a story about Tony Campolo's son who finally told his dad that he is officially a humanist.² Tony Campolo is a Christian author, speaker and professor with a worldwide audience. It was shocking for him to learn that his son has completely rejected the Christian faith. But these kinds of decisions don't happen overnight. Here is Bart's perspective in his own words. "I passed just about every stage of heresy on my way to apostasy," Bart said. "It wasn't until I exhausted every option for staying a Christian that I gave it up."

Throughout his life Bart added doubt upon doubt until his faith finally collapsed under the weight of his own doubts. It's no wonder he gave in and became a humanist. So what was the real problem in this story? It wasn't the doubts, was it. Everyone has doubts but not everyone loses their faith over their doubts. The true problem was not getting real answers to his doubts.

Do you have any plaguing doubts this day? Maybe it's about difficult passage such as this one. Next week I will offer four more reasons and solutions to this passage. But maybe your doubts are about basic ideas of our faith, about God. Just this week someone asked me, "Where did God come from." That question was not a doubt, per se, but it was a real question. Bart Campolo was the warning and now here's the encouragement--these question do have answers.

What kinds of doubts do you have right now? Remember--doubt can be a good thing if it pushes you toward an answer. And there are answers. But doubt can be a soul-killer if you allow it to eat away at you and destroy your faith. What are you doing with your doubts? What is your plan to resolve them?

Rich Maurer
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¹ http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/31/world/africa/ebola-virus-outbreak-qa.html?_r=0

² <http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/10/06/tony-campolos-surprise-reaction-son-came-humanist/>