



Lesson 15 ~ Cure for a Hard Heart

Romans 11

Discussion Starter

- What are your ethnic roots? If you could belong to any other ethnic group, which one would you choose? Why?

Introduction

Paul began these three chapters (9-11) in the middle of his letter to the Romans, with the sad paradox of Israel's condition. The Jews are God's chosen people on whom great blessing has been bestowed, yet they are caught in a cycle of unbelief and have stumbled over God's Cornerstone and Messiah, Jesus Christ. In **Romans 9 and 10**, Paul asked the question, "Was Israel's stumbling due to God's unfaithfulness to his promises to the Jews?", and we saw that the answer was "No." Rather, it was the Jew's persistent rejection and skepticism that has caused in them a hardness of heart that has blinded them to the light of the gospel.

In **Romans 11**, Paul will deal with the long-range implications of Israel's disobedience. He will ask and answer two questions: "Has God forever rejected his people?" and "Have the Jews stumbled and fallen beyond recovery?" We will learn in this chapter that the Jews' fall from grace is only temporary. God has always kept for himself a small remnant of his chosen people; and someday in the future, Israel as a whole, will turn back to their God and accept Jesus as their Messiah. This return to God will result in great blessing for the whole world. In the meantime, we learn, God has used Israel's unbelief to open the way of salvation to the Gentiles. As always, God continues to work in all things for his good.

Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 11**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalm 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Amen

2. Read **Romans 11** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version (NIV)* and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*. The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

Questions

Read **Romans 11:1-10**.

1. From what Paul has said so far in **Romans 9** and **10**, one might come to the conclusion that God has rejected his chosen people, the Jews. What is Paul's number one piece of evidence that God has not rejected the Jews (**11:1**)?
 - ♥ Have you ever felt rejected by God? Why? Have you ever rejected God? What happened?
 - ♥ What are the chances that God will ever reject his chosen people (**Jeremiah 31:35-37**)? Even if you are a Gentile Christian, what can be personally significant about this promise?
2. What is Paul's second piece of evidence proving that God has not rejected his people (**11:2-5**)?
 - ♥ What is a remnant (**11:5 NIV**)? Who was the remnant in Elijah's day (**11:4**)? In Paul's day (**11:5**)? What is Paul's point in mentioning these remnants? (Elijah's story is found in **1 Kings 18:16-19:18**.)
 - ♥ What is the cause of faith for the believing remnant (**11:5-6**)? Why is this important?
 - ♥ If the only information you had to go on was **11:5-6**, how would you define or explain God's *grace*? Why can't grace and merit (earning our way) co-exist (**11:6**)?
3. **What** were most of the Jewish people earnestly seeking and **how** were they seeking it (**11:6-7; 9:30-32**)?
 - ♥ How is it possible for someone to try so hard to please God that they actually resist him and miss what he has planned? Have you ever seen this happen? What was the result?
 - ♥ In your opinion, are most churchgoers today relying more on performance of rituals or on God's grace?
4. What does God do to people who insist on coming to God their own way (**11:7-10**)? Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?
 - ♥ From what Paul says in **11:7-9**, how would you define **hardened** in your own words?
 - ♥ **Why** do you think God hardens or blinds the heart that is persistently resistant to him so that it can no longer see or understand God's truths?
 - ♥ What personal warning do you see in **11:7-9**? How will you heed the warning?

Stubborn, willful resistance to the will of God will result in a *hardened heart*. Resisting God is like saying, "Leave me alone; I will do it my way." If this attitude goes on long enough (and only God knows the "tipping point"), God will make a person hardened to him and his truth. The Greek word for *hardening* is a medical term that refers to the tough bone fibers that grow around a fracture. Hardening is like a **callus of the heart** where repeated resistance to God will yield an **actual inability to understand and respond** to what God is saying. Insensitivity and lack of repentance are warning signs of **hardening**. As the heat of the sun hardens clay but softens wax, so the light of God's truth hardens those who resist God but softens those who are responsive to him. God does not immediately react to our first sin or even many sins. Instead, he offers kindness in hopes that we will repent from our wrong attitudes and actions. Our response is the key; we dare not let those things continue that may lead to a **hardened heart**.

5. From the following examples in scripture, what **actions** and **attitudes** should be avoided because they may lead to a *hardness of the heart*?

Example from scripture	Action or attitude to be avoided
Exodus 8:19; 9:34-35	
Deuteronomy 8:6-14	
Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95:7-8	
Proverbs 29:1	
Zechariah 7:11-13	

- ♥ What actions and attitudes described above are you most susceptible to? Why? What is the best remedy for hardness of the heart?
- ♥ Are you aware of any of these actions or attitudes in your own life right now? If so, what will you do about it?

Read **Romans 11:11-24**.

6. How has God used Israel's rejection of salvation and what will be the final outcome (**11:11-12**)?

- ♥ Paul describes a chain of events in **11:11-12**: 1) Israel (as a whole) rejects salvation through Christ; 2) the Gentiles accept what the Jews rejected; and 3) The Jews become envious of the blessings of the Gentiles and finally accept God's salvation through Christ. Which of the events has already happened for which are we still waiting? What will, do you imagine, the fulfillment of these events to look like?
- ♥ In what way would the salvation of the Gentiles cause envy in Israel (**11:11, 13-14**)? Of what, specifically, might they be envious? How could this envy or jealousy cause them to turn to Christ?
- ♥ When someone receives God's blessing and grace in their life, does that spur you on to seek God all the more, or does it leave you feeling on the short end of the stick? Why?

7. Paul uses an analogy of an olive tree (**11:16-24**) to explain the relationship between Jews and Christian Gentiles. The *olive tree*, cultivated in groves or orchards throughout Palestine, was an accepted emblem of Israel (**Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:4-6**). What does each part of the analogy listed below symbolize?

Cultivated olive tree/olive tree roots -

The wild olive tree/ olive tree "shoot" -

The "branches" which have been broken off -

The "branches" that have been grafted in -

8. In order to follow Paul's analogy and reasoning, summarize in your own words the main point(s) in each of the following verses.

Verse	Main Point(s)
11:17	
11:18	
11:19	
11:20	
11:21	

11:22	
11:23	
11:24	

- ♥ For what reasons could a Christian Gentile be tempted to feel superior to a Jew? How might a Christian today feel superior to a non-Christian? Why are these comparisons foolish and wrong?
- ♥ What two qualities of God are mentioned in **11:22**? Which one of these qualities are you likely to emphasize over the other? Why? What decides which attitude God has toward you?
- ♥ Read **Galatians 3:28** and **Ephesians 2:11-22**. Someday, what will be the relationship between Christian Jews and Gentiles? How can you prepare for this day? How can you help make it a reality now?

Read **Romans 11:25-36**.

9. A *mystery*, in the Bible, refers to something that was formerly hidden or obscure, but is now revealed by God so that it can be known and understood by all. What is the **mystery** that Paul wants his readers to understand (**11:25-27**)?

- ♥ What might be one indication that the “full number of Gentiles” coming to Christ (**11:25**) is close to completion (**Matthew 28:19-20; 24:14 and Mark 13:10**)?
- ♥ Do you expect to see the fulfillment of **11:25-27** in your lifetime? Why or why not? What difference does it make if we are close to the fulfillment of these events? Is there any way to know when this time will come? Why or why not?

10. For what reasons will Israel someday be saved (**11:28-29**)?

- ♥ When Paul says in **11:26** that “*all* Israel will be saved,” does he mean that every individual Jew will come to Christ at that time? Why or why not?
- ♥ What does **11:29** mean to you if you apply it personally? What are the implications of this statement for you? How does it make you feel towards God? Yourself?
- ♥ God’s gifts and call are irrevocable (can never be withdrawn). Does this mean that his gifts and call can’t be rejected? Why or why not?

11. According to **11:30-32**, what experience will both Jews and Gentiles undergo?

- ♥ Why does Paul consider disobedience a **binding** or **imprisonment** (**11:32**)? How has this been true in your life? How has God’s mercy set you free?
- ♥ **Romans 11:33-36** is a *doxology* – an expression or hymn of praise to God. Why do you think Paul placed this hymn of praise at this point in his letter to the Romans? What characteristics of God does he praise that seem to relate to what he has revealed about the Jews and Gentiles in **Romans 9-11**?

Response

Read Paul’s doxology in **11:33-36** out loud. For what specific characteristics does Paul praise God? On the back of this sheet paraphrase Paul’s doxology using your own words **OR** write your own doxology to God mentioning specific characteristics that you love and appreciate about God. Make this a **daily prayer** of praise and devotion until it’s meaning has saturated your heart – and until you know it by heart!