What About Israel?
How To Understand Romans 11

Robert Hawker | Added: Sep 25, 2014 | Category: Theology

I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1).

The doctrine of election has been, and must be, to every carnal mind, of all others the most offensive. And as the Apostle, when entering upon the Epistle to the Romans, engaged in it, with a special view to establish the Church in the grand truth, of justification before God in Christ, without the deeds of the law; this involved in it the doctrine of election. And the Apostle, in the ninth Chapter, devoted the whole of it to this one purpose. And, in that very interesting part of the Epistle, he most fully proved the certainty of the doctrine, in the rejection of the Jews, and the call of the Gentiles. Foreseeing, however, that what he had there advanced, would rouse the resentment of the carnal and ungodly, and that some would misconstrue the doctrine, as though the whole body of the Jews had been rejected of God; he enters upon this Chapter with showing the mistake of such men, and in his own instance proves, that there were among the Jews, as well as among the Gentiles, the Lord's chosen ones.

He begins the Chapter with a question, which was Paul's usual method, when he had some grand, and momentous point of doctrine, more particularly to establish, in order that he might the better confirm it. Hath God (saith he) cast away his people? And, he answers it with a kind of abhorrence; God forbid! Yea, the whole of God's purposes, is with an eye to the preservation of his people. The whole, and every individual of that mystical body the Lord gave to His Son before the world, is to be gathered out of the present time-state of the Church. It was for this Church, the Lord went forth in acts of creation. everything in nature, and in providence, is made to minister to this one purpose. And when the grand object, in the recovery of the Church is accomplished, from the present time-state in which she is now involved; the earth itself, with all that is in it, will be done away, like the scaffolding for a building, which is taken down when the building itself is finished; and Christ will bring home His Church to the eternal state of glory all along intended.

The Apostle intimates, that this hath been the design of Jehovah, from the beginning. And in proof, he adverts to a well-known part of the scripture history, in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19:10-14), where, in the worst of times, there were in Israel seven thousand, whom the Lord, by electing grace, had preserved from the general apostasy. And hence Paul, in a most

decided and unanswerable manner shows, that as it is electing grace in God, and not the smallest merit of man, which makes this difference there must be, for the carrying on the Lord's designs in relation to Christ's Church, in the present time, and in all times, until the whole purposes of the Lord in his Church are accomplished; a remnant according to the election of grace. For, such is the everlasting and unalterable nature of things in their distinct properties, that grace in God, and merit in man, (if he had any,) must be always opposite to each other. It ceaseth to be grace, if man obtains anything by merit. And thus the Apostle, in a single verse, proves beyond all possible dispute, that all the Church of God, in every single instance receives, from beginning to end, in electing, regenerating, redeeming, justifying, sanctifying love, is wholly of grace. Through all the departments of nature, providence, grace, and glory, there is, there can be, not an atom in either, but what springs from this source, This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise, (Isaiah 43:21).

But, while the Apostle thus clearly and unanswerably sets the doctrine of election upon its own just basis, he again foresaw an objection, which the unbelieving part of mankind would bring still against it. Israel, that is, Israel as a nation in the flesh, had not obtained what they sought after. But the election (saith he) hath. So that here seemed some difficulty. Nay, the objector would add, it is said, that God gave to them that were blinded a spirit of slumber, that they should not see. And the Apostle makes quotations, both from the Prophets David, and Isaiah, in confirmation, (Isaiah 6:9; Psalm 69:22, 23). But these points, so far from becoming arguments, to call in question the reality of the doctrine itself, only tend the more to establish it. Everything in the word of God, connected with the history of the Church, proves God's original and eternal choice in the appointment. And, it is impossible to trace that history, through any of the several parts of it, without being led to see, the Lord's distinguishing grace, and mercy, ordering and directing the whole.

In following up the Apostle's statement, as here given, between the Church and the world, between the remnant, as he calls them, according to the election of grace, and the rest which he describes as blinded, it may not be improper to call in to our aid, what the word of God hath said, in relation to both; by which, under divine teaching, we shall discover, that while the one received all from grace, and therefore had nothing to boast, but everything to be thankful for; the other had no right to complain, having no pretensions to divine favour, and therefore no injustice done him. This view of the subject may be made evident, under both branches of it In relation to the Church. When it pleased God, in his threefold character of Persons, to raise up a Church, at the head of which the Son of God in our nature was placed, to be for Jehovah's glory and the Church's happiness; the Lord was pleased to love this Church with an everlasting love, and in proof of it, chose this Church, in all the individual members of it, in Christ: gave them being in Christ, and a well-being of endless life and blessedness in Christ; predestinating them to the adoption of sons, and appointing them

to an everlasting state of holiness, and glory, in Christ; or, to speak in Scripture language, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Thus ordaining, and appointing things, in the infinite mind and will of Jehovah, before all worlds; the events, which were to take place during the time-state of the Church, could not be supposed as counteracting what had been before arranged in eternity; but rather promoting, and bringing about, the Lord's original designs and purposes. When, therefore, the Lord went forth in acts of creation, and the Church, which had existed in the divine mind from all eternity, was now to be brought forth into being in the Adam-nature so ordained; the fall which followed, and in which the whole Church, as well as the whole world in the Adam-race were involved, could not do away God's purposes, neither destroy that grace-union with Christ, which arose out of an everlasting love, incapable of being lessened or changed. It might, as it did indeed, lay the foundation for bringing greater glory to the Lord, in affording occasion, as had been before determined, for the Son of God, in the nature of His Church, to redeem her from the ruins of the fall, and for raising her up a spotless Church, to be the partaker with Him, of all His communicable glory, in His kingdom forever. Here we discover somewhat of the electing love of God, to the Church. To this source, as to a fountain, must be ascribed all the blessings manifested in such a distinguishing way, as is discovered, in the several streams, of redeeming, calling, justifying, sanctifying grace, which maketh glad the city of God.

In relation to the world, by which I mean the Christless world, the doctrine is equally plain and evident. The whole as well as the Church, had their being in Adam, the one common head. And, had they continued in the perfection of being in which they were created, this creature-perfection, with all its happiness, would have continued with them. But when in Adam all fell, and none but those who from grace-union in Christ, were to be recovered by Christ; of consequence, those who never had any other relation to Christ, than as His creatures, and not the members of His mystical body, could not be interested in His salvation. The one could not lose their blessings in Christ, because, as members of His body, they were part of Christ. The other could not receive benefit from Christ, having no union with Christ. And indeed, had the fall never taken place, the consequence of election would have still made a striking difference, between the Church of Christ, and the world. For while the world, in the Adam-nature derived from the first man, could have arrived to no higher source, than the nature from whence it originated; the Church from her union with Christ, and interest in Christ as her Head, must have had communion in all that belonged to Christ, and enjoyed the peculiar and personal blessings founded in that union, in time, and to all eternity.

Here then we may safely rest. Christ and his Church are One, And by electing love, with all its blissful properties, every child of God, who is conscious, that by regenerating grace he is brought out of the Adam-nature

of the fall, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; may well contemplate, for it is his privilege, and must be his happiness so to do, the wonderful subject, with the most profound reverence, adoration, humbleness of soul, and praise to God, in his daily walk through life. Oh! How often, and how earnest, will that cry of the soul arise before God, when, with the astonishment of the Apostle, he will feel himself constrained to say, Lord! how is it that thou hast manifested thyself to me, and not unto the world? (John 14:22).

And, in respect to the Christless world, the fall of man cannot, in its nature and consequences, be a source of disquietude to the Church, more than the fall of Angels. Secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children forever, (Deuteronomy 29:29). The Lord's sovereignty is an everlasting answer to all the cavils of the ungodly. Neither can the justice of God be impeached, if sin brings forth death; for this is but the natural consequences of cause and effect. And the words of our Lord are sweetly formed, for the uninterrupted repose of all His children, when at any time (tempted by the world, by Satan, or the ill-judged and mistaken feelings of nature, untaught by grace), unbecoming thoughts may arise in the mind. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father! for so it seemed good in thy sight, (Matthew 11:25, 26).

The Apostle all along must be considered, as speaking of a distinction, between Israel after the flesh, and the Israel of God by promise. The Israel after the flesh, had no privileges, but in the outward ministry of the word. The Israel of promise, though they stumbled in the Adam-fall, in common with the rest, and for a while (as in the instance of those who crucified Christ, but afterwards were pricked to the heart and saved: (Acts 2:23-37)). were living without God and without Christ; yet being in the Covenant, were brought to the knowledge of the truth, and saved with an everlasting salvation. If the Reader, in going over those and the like passages of Scripture, had these things always in remembrance, it would serve, under God, to throw a great light upon the subject throughout.

The figure Paul uses, of the olive tree wild by nature, and grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, is beautifully chosen, to represent not only the Gentile Church incorporated into Christ in distinction to the Jewish Church; but also hath an allusion to both Jew and Gentile, yea the whole Church, in being taken from the old Adam-nature of the fall, and by sovereign grace, made a right noble plant in Christ Jesus. The Apostle's expression in allusion to Christ, is not only very blessed, in that it refers to the perfection of Christ, for His people, and to His people; but it runs it up to the first, original, and eternal cause, in the holiness of Christ's nature, as the first fruit, and root of all. For Christ is the root, as well as the offspring of David. And, Christ was first chosen in the infinite mind of Jehovah, and then the Church in Him, before the foundation of the world, (Ephesians

1:4).

It would be well, if this grand and fundamental truth of our most holy faith, was fully formed, and established in the mind, in order to help us to right apprehensions of what Christ is in Himself, and what He is to His people. Everything is in Christ of holiness. Everything is of Christ for holiness. And he is made of God everything to us in holiness, in being our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, that all our glorying may be in the Lord, (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31). One or two words, on those great points, of Christ as he is in Himself, and as He is to His people, will serve, under grace, to put this matter in a clear light; and, if the Lord be our teacher, we shall enter into a right apprehension of the Apostle's expression: For if the first fruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Now first, in relation to that holy, spotless, portion of our nature, taken by the Son of God into union with himself, nothing can be more evident, than that it was wholly a right seed; for it was underived from the fallen stock, and not formed after the ordinary method of generation. So that Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, (Hebrews 7:26). And, what is highly proper to be understood, but hath not been as generally considered as it ought, that when to the infinite mind, and foreknowledge of Jehovah, this holy portion of our nature came up before Him and before all worlds; all His seed were in Him, beheld in Him, and considered as part of Himself: chosen in him, as Scripture expresses it, to be holy and without blame before him in love, (Ephesians 1:4). In this sense, the Apostle's words appear most blessed. The first fruit holy, the lump also holy. The root holy, and consequently the branches. In Christ His whole Church was contained. Just as the first root of any tree, planted in the earth, contained in it, all the after trees, and branches to come from it. And, as Levi is said to have been in the loins of his father Abraham, when Melchisedec met him and blessed him (Hebrews 7:10). So the Church, in all her Individual members, was in Christ the seed of Christ; and blessed in Christ, from, and to all eternity. Hence all these sweet promises of Jehovah to His Son: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring, (Isaiah 44:3). Hence the same repeated: My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth, and forever, (Isaiah 59:21). Pause over the lovely view, for it is most lovely! Oh! what a thought for a child of God to cherish in his bosom, that not only He that sanctifies, and they who are sanctified, are all of one, (Hebrews 2:11), but everyone of Christ's seed, was in Christ, chosen in Christ, included in Christ, and (as the branch in the root) holy in Christ's holiness, before God forever!

And secondly, from this holiness in Christ and from Christ, the holiness of the Church must be wholly formed and derive all her holiness. For, as all original sin is from Adam; so all original holiness is from Christ. So Paul

speaks, when saying that, as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous, (Romans 5:19). And the sanctification of the Church is wholly ascribed, to the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. For by one offering he hath perfected forever, them that are sanctified, (Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14). So that the sanctification of the Church is not in them, but for them. Not in any act of theirs, but in the act of Christ. Not in any holiness wrought within them, but without them. The happy partakers of Christ's holiness do no more towards their sanctification, than towards their justification. So saith the Scriptures: and so their souls, when taught of God, bear testimony. For Paul, speaking to the Church at Corinth, when declaring the grace of God shown them in their recovery from the Adam-nature of sin, saith: And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God, (1 Corinthians 6:11). And all the sweet and gracious effects, which flow from the in-dwelling residence of God the Holy Ghost in their bodies, which are his temple, and which manifest themselves in their life and conversation; are not their sanctification, but the result of their being sanctified. These are the fruits, not the root: the effects, not the cause. The one complete source of the sanctification of the Church, as it appears before God, is the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And it is the testimony of God the Holy Ghost concerning it, that Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate, (Hebrews 13:12). And, it is as expressly said to be the will of God in this offering, and for this purpose: By the which will we are sanctified, (Hebrews 10:10). And when God the Holy Ghost, by the sweet constraining influences of his grace, worketh in us both to will, and to do, of His good pleasure; opens to our view, the Lord Christ, in all His offices, characters, and relations; gives us to see Christ as made of God unto us all these, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and both teaches, and enables us, how to live upon Christ, in the enjoyment of all these: then, do we enter into the blessed apprehension of our union with Christ, and communion with Christ; and learn, by heart-felt experience, that as the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy: and as the root is holy, so are the branches.

I stay not to make observations upon what is so abundantly plain as to need no observation, that, what the Apostle hath said, respecting the rejection of the Jew, and the calling of the Gentile, refers to the several ministrations in the Church, in the different ages, and under the different dispensations of it. Christ's Church is but one. And that Church hath been set up, with her glorious Head, and Husband, from everlasting. Their names all given, and numbered. And hence, all Israel that is, all the true Israel of God, given by the Father to the Son, and redeemed from the Adam nature of the fall by the Son, shall be saved; and in the effectual call of God the Spirit, shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth. And these blessed events are included in what is said, and as the Prophet foretold, of the Deliverer

coming out of Zion, to turn away ungodliness from Jacob, (Isaiah 59:20). I pray you to pause over the wonderful account, of what is related in this Chapter. And, if in the contemplation of the vast subject, the Apostle Paul, who had been caught up to the third heaven, and drank so deep into the mysteries of the Gospel, was constrained to cry out, as he hath here done: Oh! the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! Think, with what veneration and awe, men of less knowledge in the divine science, ought to receive the sublime truths of God; referring all of the works and counsel of God into God's own wise, and unerring will, and pleasure. everything in God, and from God, must necessarily be imperfectly understood by creatures, of the limited, and scanty apprehension of man. God in Christ, the Son of God tabernacling in our nature, His Church one in Him, falling into apostasy by sin, recovered by sovereign grace, the Church branching out into the double family of Jew and Gentile, the Lord's ways in the call of the Gentile and the rejection of the Jew, together with all the wonderful events accomplished in bringing home the Church, through all the departments of nature, providence, grace, and glory: all these, and numberless other points connected with the vast subject, direct the mind into such a depth of mystery, that we are unavoidably led to the same view as the Apostle; convinced, that the ways and works of God, toward His Church and people, never could have been conceived, much less understood, had they not been graciously revealed by Him. Oh! wonderful Counsellor! Oh! gracious design of love and favour to the Church! What will be the wonders of eternity, when the whole shall come to be unfolded to the wondering world, of angels, and of men; and all will be found directed, to give glory, and honour, and power, to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain, forever, and ever, Amen.

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