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Exegesis of Romans 11:25-35

A main turning point in the book of Romans is chapter 11. In chapter 11 Paul directs his attention from the Jews to the Gentiles. 11:13 states “But I speak to you that are Gentiles” (ASV). Chapter 11 does not stand alone, as it relates to the underlining theme of the book of Romans. The book of Romans is a book of unity and in chapter 11 Paul again tries to unite the Jews and Gentiles on common ground. This common unifying ground will be examined shortly, however, it behooves one to examine the other unifying factors that have previously been discussed in this epistle.

The book of Romans begins in chapter one with the unifying theme as found in 1:16f, which declares to the reader that Jew and Gentile can be made just by faith in the gospel “as it is written ‘but the righteous will live by faith’” (1:17). Chapter 1:18 – 3:31 unifies its readers by teaching that all have sinned, all need to be justified and that none can justify themselves by keeping law. Chapter 4 unifies the Jews and Gentiles on the basis of justification by faith, this is illustrated by the account of Abraham and how it was reckoned to him as righteousness when he believed. The righteousness on the basis of the faith of Abraham makes him the father of “all” (Jew or Gentile). This means that all who believe may also be reckoned as righteous. Chapter Five again unites the Jew and Gentile by illustrating from the account of Adam that all are subject to death and that all need Christ. In chapter six it is shown that if one is in Christ, they will be dead to sin, and in chapter seven, the struggle to die to sin is illustrated. Chapter 8 shows the blessings that come from being united in Christ on the basis of justification by faith, and chapter 9 confirms that it has always been God’s plan. Chapter 10 brings the final argument for

justification by faith and not the keeping of law, and with the end of chapter 10 and the all of chapter 11 Israel is reminded that God has not rejected them.

The passage of concern in this paper is Romans 11:25-35. It is the goal of this paper to examine this passage in light of the larger context of the book of Romans. This passage will then be exegeted so as to come to the conclusion of what the immediate context of this passage is. In the conclusion of this study Martin Luther's and K.C Moser's commentary will presented in dialogue with the conclusions reached in this paper.

As the epistle is leading to our passage of study (Romans 11:25-35) the Apostle Paul is painting an exquisite picture of God's unwavering love for Israel. A Jew reading this epistle may have come to the conclusion that they could not ever be just, they may be thinking that they had been wasting their time and that God has neglected them for the Gentiles. Paul in 11:1 answers the Jewish question about God rejecting them, Paul declares "may it never be". However, Paul does say that although God never rejected Israel, many of Israel have rejected God. It is illustrated to the Jewish reader that one of the reasons that the gospel was given to the Gentiles was to provoke the Jews to jealousy and move them to draw closer to God (11:11).

In 11:13 the epistle takes a drastic turn, the intended audience goes from the Jews to the Gentiles. As mentioned previously, one of the underlying themes of the epistle is unity and equality. The Gentiles may be gaining an heir of superiority as they read this book. Paul has spent a large portion of the epistle telling the Jews not to boast, and now he beseeches the Gentiles to not be arrogant also.

Paul explains why they should all come to Christ and have an attitude of humility by the olive tree illustration. In verses 17-25 Paul identifies God's people as being a tree. The Jews were part of this tree, but some Jews rejected Christ and were thus broken off. Where the Jews

who rejected Christ were broken off the Gentiles were allowed to be grafted in. At this point in the text the Gentiles may be feeling better than the Jews, but Paul reminds them in verse 21 “for if God spared not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee”. If the Gentiles continued in there boasting they would be broken off in the same way the unbelieving Jews were broken off. If the Jews believe, they likewise will also be grafted back into the tree in the same manner as the Gentiles (11:23-24). In verse 25 he really hammers this idea of not being conceited when he tells them to “not be wise in there own understanding” (NASB).

The verse in this chapter that presents the exegete the most difficulty is the beginning of 11:26 which states “and so all Israel will be saved...”. The question that must be answered is who “all Israel” is in reference to. With this verse there are two possible interpretations, 1. The physical nation of Israel, and 2. The spiritual nation of Israel.

When exegeting this passage it appears that the most likely interpretation of 11:26, is that “all of Israel” is referring to the physical nation. The Gentiles were assuming that that hardening of the Jews was eternal, but Paul is correcting them by proclaiming that “all of Israel shall be saved”. “All Israel” in the context of Romans 11 must be seen as literal. 11:1,2,7,25 the Israel being referred to is literal Israel. It is poor exegesis to take one verse out of five and make the word mean something different than the definition of the word in the preceding verses. Also the word *hutos* “and so” in verse 26 could be better translated “in this manner” (Bauer 602). Thus what Paul is saying, is in the same manner of being grafted in as the Gentiles were, the unbelieving Jews can be grafted also if they believe. 100% “all” of Israel has the chance of being saved if they believe and are grafted in as the Gentiles were.

One difficulty when examining this passage is the word “all”. “All” or *pas* in the book of Romans in many places takes on a theological significance when in reference to both Jew and

Gentile, as it does in 1:16. There are, however, in the book of Romans places where *pas* is not in reference to both Jew and Gentile such as 1:5, 2:1 and others. When a verse in the book of Romans containing the word *pas* is examined, the definition of *pas* is to be determined by the context. As observed previously the context of Romans 11 demands that “all Israel” means all Israel, not a figurative representation of all of God’s people as other passages suggest.

Continuing in verse 26 the beloved apostle quotes Isaiah 59:20-21 to reiterate the point that God has always wanted to offer salvation to the Jews. As chapter 11 continues, the point of the passage is made wonderfully clear, the point is that God wants Jew and Gentile to be saved. The passage shows that there was a time where both groups rejected God but now they can be united together as they are grafted into the tree in the same way. 11:32 states “For God hath shut up all in disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all”. God’s plan is not always a plan that all can understand (11:33). Even though all the nuances of God’s plan cannot be understood, the point of this passage is clear. God wants both Jew and Gentile to be saved, both Jew and Gentile were separated from God at one time, both Jews and Gentile are saved in the same way, and thus, neither Jew or Gentile has reason to boast.

Luther and Moser are in agreement with this writer in most of their interpretations of this pericope. The only place where there is a difference is in 11:26 and the phrase “all Israel”. Luther took the position that “all Israel” is in reference to spiritual Israel, meaning all believers. Moser on the other hand takes a position similar to this writer that “all Israel” is referring to physical Israel being saved by being grafted through belief in the same manner as the Gentiles.

In conclusion, the book of Romans proclaims justification on the basis of faith. Underlying that purpose of a deeper understanding of justification is the theme of unity. Rome was a church divided and the Jews and Gentiles were in opposition to one another. In chapters

one through eleven Paul beautifully illustrates numerous reasons on why Jew and Gentile are one in the same in the eyes of God. Chapter 11 brings to an end the doctrinal unity that the Jews and Gentiles must embrace. In chapter 12 the book takes a turn to the practical application of the previous eleven chapters. Chapter 11 is the conclusion of Paul's doctrinal discourse for unity, chapter 11 shows that no matter what race you are, wither you rejected God in the past or in the present, there is room for all in God's tree and you can be grafted in if you have faith and come to Him.

Works Cited

Bauer, Walter. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 2nd E.d. Edited By. W.F Arndt and F.W Gingrich. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.