

97-01-19b

We're back from our break now and as we continue our study in Romans 11, we are looking at this cause and effect chronology, if you will, of blindness and hardness of heart, deaf ears and so forth. This is a serious issue and it has divided Christian thinking down through the centuries. There are many, and I mean a very many, who have thought that this is a decision that God makes, which people will be believers and which will be unbelievers, and even among believers, which ones are going to have insight and understanding into God's Word that he sort of arbitrarily, for reasons known only to himself in his inscrutability, has decided that it glorifies him and fulfills his purpose to blind and harden certain people and to illuminate and cultivate others.

And we find this to be a very difficult truth and even the people who believe this acknowledge that it's a difficult truth and I think in some cases sort of pride themselves on having accepted it despite its difficulty and imply that there's some lack of humility or lack of submission on the part of people who don't accept this difficult truth. And it almost becomes a point of pride that, well, I'm not scared by the inscrutability of God and I don't understand why you're having to wrestle with it. One of the reasons we wrestle with it is that we are called to be imitators of God and God acts and behaves and communicates the truth about himself to give us an example.

We are created in the image of God and after his likeness. Christ is the fullness of the deity in bodily form and we don't find this sort of behavior in Christ. People point to Christ and the disciples talking to them about the parables and he says, to you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom but to those outside everything is in parables so that seeing they will see and not perceive and hearing they will hear and not understand and so forth.

But the very same principle is in operation there as we saw last time that the heart of the people who have already made up their minds that they want to pursue righteousness by works and they want the approbation of people, the Pharisees who stand on the street corners and pray loudly and long, Lord I thank you that I am not like other men and so forth instead of the tax collector who beats his breast and doesn't even dare raise his eyes to heaven and says, Lord have mercy on me a sinner. That's what Jesus pointed out. There is a difference in the heart attitude and that determines whether God is going to illuminate and cultivate or if he is going to blind and harden.

So what is the situation here? It is a reflection of what God says in the Old Testament. Turn back with me to the beginning of the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 4. One of the keys to the interpretation of this very long and full book is to pay attention to the beginning of it and in Isaiah you have throughout the first four or five chapters a description of the apostasy and the apathy and the disobedience and rebellious spirit that prevails in the Israel of Isaiah's day. One of the reasons that they are on the brink of captivity with the invasion of the enemies of Israel and the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and so forth with Sennacherib is that they have been disobedient.

God has removed the wall of protection. God is about to take them out under the fifth of the five cycles of discipline described in the law of Moses. And so the leadership in Israel is disobedient and apathetic to the things of God and they are a reflection of the hearts of the people.

Let's look, for example, in chapter 5. Here God uses a parable, if you will, an illustration to describe the conditions in Israel. Let me sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved regarding his vineyard. My well-beloved, and of course this is God himself, has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.

Everything necessary for a productive, prolific stand of grapes is there on this hill. It's a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones and planted it with the choicest vine.

He built a tower in its midst and also made a winepress in it. So he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes, and this is actually worthless ones. Now O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? What is the picture here? God has done everything. God didn't plant the vineyard in stony soil. He didn't fail to water it.

He didn't fail to hedge it around and protect it from intruders. God has done everything possible. He planted it on a fruitful hill.

He's given it everything and he expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it does not. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes, these worthless grapes? Now please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it shall be burned, and I will break down its wall and it shall be trampled down.

I will lay it waste. It shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.

What a graphic picture we have here. What is the sequence of cause and effect? God begins by doing and providing everything and expecting good grapes. The grapes grow up as worthless grapes.

That's a decision they made, not God made in this picture. And because they came up as worthless grapes in spite of God's best efforts, God is going to remove their protection. He's going to remove their provision.

And He is going to put active discipline on that vineyard. And notice the last thing there. I will command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.

Remember Hebrews chapter 6, that the field with the rain coming many times upon it and bears

only thorns and briars is cursed and is fit only for burning. That rain coming many times upon it is a picture of the Word of God. It's a picture of the provision of God and the grace of God to provide everything to bring forth fruit.

And He explains this picture or this parable in chapter 5, verse 7 of Isaiah. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. This is one of many places where you see that the house of Israel is that vineyard that God has planted.

It's the realm of believers. It's the saved. The men of Judah are His pleasant plant.

He looked for justice. He looked for good grapes. But instead of justice, He finds oppression.

He looked for righteousness. But instead of righteousness, there's a cry. A cry for help is the way that the New King James translates this.

And then in the rest of chapter 5, He describes what these worthless grapes are like. They join land to land and house to house. They're materialistic.

They want great and beautiful houses. And God says He's going to devastate and destroy those. Verse 11, woe to those who rise up early in the morning to follow intoxicating drink.

They want stimulation. They want the sensations of pleasure and so forth that come through this inflaming power of the wine. They want music and so forth.

And look at verse 12, they do not regard the works of the Lord and they do not consider the operation of His hands. They are sitting there in this fruitful hill surrounded by the hedge with the rain coming down upon them. And instead of regarding the work of the Lord and considering the operation of His hand, they are self-indulgent.

They pursue their own pleasure and their own stimulation. What's going to happen? He's already described it. God's going to break down the hedge, knock down the wall, take away the rain.

He's going to allow that. He's not going to prune or cultivate. He's going to let the briars and the thorns grow up.

Look at verse 13, because they do not regard the work of the Lord, because they do not consider the operation of His hands, therefore my people are gone into captivity. Because they have no knowledge, their honorable men are famished and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.

Their glory and their multitude and their pomp and he who is jubilant will all descend into it. People shall be brought down, each man shall be humbled and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled. But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment and God who is holy shall be hallowed in righteousness.

Then the lambs shall feed in their pasture and in the waste places of the fat ones strangers shall eat. Woe to those who draw along iniquity with cords of vanity and draw sin along as if it were a cart rope. They say, let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it and so forth.

Look at verse 20, woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight. Woe to men who are mighty at drinking wine.

This is very graphic in the Hebrew. They consider themselves to be heroic wine drinkers. They take pride in how much they can drink and that they can drink someone else under the table.

Woe to men who are valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, who justify the wicked for a bribe and take away justice from the righteous man. Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble and as flame consumes the chaff, so their root will be as rottenness and their blossom will ascend like dust because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts and despise the word of the Holy One of Israel. This is not talking about salvation.

These are believers who have been disobedient, apathetic, faithless, rebellious. The anger of the Lord is aroused against His people. He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them and the hills tremble.

Their carcasses are as refuse in the midst of the streets. And even for all this, His anger is not turned away. His hand is still stretched out.

And then it talks about what He's going to do as far as invasion by the nations. He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar and will whistle to them from the ends of the earth. They will come with speed swiftly.

No one will be weary or stumble among them. This is a contrast between these supposed heroes in Israel who are heroes of wine, who are party animals. They're great heroes of parties.

God is going to call the genuine military heroes in from these nations. They are not weary. They don't stumble.

No one slumbers or sleeps. Their belt on their loins is not loose. Their strap of their sandals is not broken.

Their arrows are sharp and all their bows are bent. Their horses' hooves are like flint and their wheels like a whirlwind. Their roaring will be like a lion and they will roar like young lions.

They will roar and lay hold of the prey. They will carry it away and no one will deliver. In that day they will roar against them like the roaring of the sea.

And if one looks at the land, behold, darkness, sorrow, and the light is darkened by the clouds.

The provision and protection of God, the wall and the hedge that surround the vineyard is broken down and they're going to be pillaged and plundered by the enemies of Israel. Now keep that in mind and I want to look right at the next chapter, Isaiah chapter 6. That's the context into which these next words fall.

Isaiah 3, 4, and 5 precede what God says to Isaiah in chapter 6. The year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah has this vision of the Lord seated on his throne, the cherubim and so forth, the glory of the Lord. He says, I'm undone, I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst, in verse 5, of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Now notice something here. Isaiah is a man of unclean lips and he dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips. He and they are the same.

What's the difference in the people and in Isaiah? Isaiah acknowledges this and we've talked about confession of sin in 1 John 1, 9 and the idea of rebound and fellowship and so forth. This is one of the passages to keep in mind because confession of sin is a legitimate and important function that believers should exercise. It's something that Isaiah does right here.

He says, woe to me, I am a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Now where are the other people? Where are the rest of the nation and their unclean lips? Are they speaking and confessing that sin? They're not.

But Isaiah is. Isaiah recognizes and acknowledges not only his own personal sin, but the sin of the people of God as a whole. And as a result, in verse 6, one of the seraphim flew to him, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar.

Isaiah says in verse 7, he touched my mouth with it and said, behold, this has touched your lips. Your iniquity is taken away and your sin is purged. Why is Isaiah's iniquity taken away and his sin purged? Because he has confessed his iniquity.

He has acknowledged it before God. He says, God, here's my problem. I have unclean lips.

And his lips are purged and his sin is cleansed. It's direct cause and effect and the same principle holds true as we see in 1 John 1, verse 9. If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's exactly what happens here.

Now look at verse 8. I heard the voice of the Lord saying, whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then I said, here am I. Send me. Isaiah is qualified and ready for this ministry because he is cleansed. He's not bearing unforgiven iniquity.

And the voice in verse 9, he said, go and tell this people. What people? This people. This people of unclean lips.

This people who are mighty men at drinking wine, who are valiant for mixing intoxicating drinks,

who justify the wicked. This vineyard that has brought forth only bad grapes. This vineyard that God cultivated and put a hedge around and planted on a fertile hill.

That's this people. This people has the expectation from God of producing fruit and they have not. That's this people and it's essential to understand that when we look at this.

Go and tell this people, this disobedient people. Keep on hearing but do not understand. Keep on seeing but do not perceive.

Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and shut their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and return and be healed. They are ripe for discipline.

They have had opportunity after opportunity. The rain has descended. They have been pruned.

They've been cultivated. God has sent prophet after prophet, exhortation after exhortation, warning after warning to this vineyard and it has responded only with bad grapes. And so now God is putting them in the discipline phase.

They're going to be invaded. They're going to be conquered and the illumination of the word of God, the seers and the prophets are going to be cut off just like we saw it in Micah. This is a result of apathy, faithlessness, disobedience, being negative consistently toward God after provision upon provision upon provision.

And this blindness and hardness and deafness is a result of disobedience, not its cause and not its source. Notice verse 11, Then I said, Lord, how long, how long is this blindness and insensitivity going to persist? Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitants, until the houses are without a man and the land is utterly desolate. The Lord has removed men far away in the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

Look at verse 13, But yet a tenth will be in it and will return or repent. Now in the New King James, this says yet a tenth will be in it and will return and be for consuming. I like the translation that the Tanakh, the Jewish translation of the Old Testament scriptures has here.

It says there will yet be a tenth in it who will repent essentially even though it is consumed. The nation is going to be consumed, but there's going to be a tenth that will repent even in the midst of this ravaging. It's going to be ravaged like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is cut down.

Even so, the holy seed will be that stump. There's going to be a remnant that acknowledges God whose hearts are turned toward God and they're going to be preserved. They're going to remain.

When the tree is cut down and ravaged, the stump is going to remain and that seed is going to sprout anew from that stump. So you have here the same principles that we're seeing in Romans

9, 10, and 11. You have the people of God, the believers represented here, the nation of Israel who are apathetic and disobedient.

They are the vineyard that is cultivated and produces the bad grapes. They don't respond. They don't bear fruit to God.

And as a result, they're going to be disciplined and a part of that discipline is blindness and deafness. No more provision of the word. The rain is going to be cut off and not fall on the land anymore.

And instead, they're going to be invaded. Sheep are going to graze where these grapes were supposed to be growing and invaders are going to come in. But there's going to be a remnant preserved and God is going to demonstrate that even in the midst of this discipline, those who turn their hearts toward Him will be preserved.

They're going to be the stump. We think of Nebuchadnezzar when he disregarded God and set up the giant image of himself and commanded everyone to worship. Nebuchadnezzar was a believer.

He was a proselyte, if you will, to the people of God. And yet, because he disregarded God, Daniel interpreted the dream that he had where there was a tree that was cut down and they put an iron band around the stump. And you remember Nebuchadnezzar for seven years went insane and he ate grass and grazed like an animal and his hair and his fingernails and toenails grew like the claws of an animal and he was senseless and was humiliated for these seven years.

We might today say that this was an extreme nervous breakdown. He lost all ability to perceive. And yet, in the dream, he's like the stump that's banded about with a band of iron.

And after that period of discipline on him is completed, he's restored and he comes back to his throne and that stump that was banded about sprouts anew. And that's the picture here. This holy seed is going to be a stump.

You can see the same thing in, look at Isaiah chapter 44. Once again, you have the context here that Israel is disobedient and ignores and is apathetic toward all the things of God. And you can see this, for example, in 43, 20, the beast of the field will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself.

They shall declare my praise. But you have not called upon me, O Jacob, and you have been weary of me, O Israel. You have not brought me the sheep for your burnt offering, nor have you honored me with your sacrifices and so forth.

Verse 24, you have bought me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied me with the

fattest sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins. You have wearied me with your iniquities.

And he calls them in verse 26, put me in remembrance. Let us contend together. State your case that you may be acquitted and so forth.

And so he talks in chapter 44 of Isaiah about how they have turned instead to idols, these people of God. Verse 13, the craftsman stretches out his rule. He marks one out with chalk.

He fashions it with a plane, marks it out with a compass, and makes it like the figure of a man. He cuts down cedars for himself, takes the cypress and the oak. He secures for himself among the trees of the forest.

He plants a pine and the rain nourishes it. It is for a man to burn. He will take some of it and warm himself.

He kindles it and bakes bread. In verse 15, he makes a god and worships it. He makes a carved image and falls down to it.

So he takes part of the wood and burns it in the fire and bakes his bread. And he takes the other part of the wood and carves out an image and falls down and worships it. God says, what kind of sense does this make, O house of Israel? Can't you even perceive this? Can't you understand how senseless this is, what you're doing? He burns half of it in the fire.

With this half, he eats meat. He roasts the roast and is satisfied and warms himself. He says, ah, I am warm.

I have seen the fire. And the rest of it he makes into a god. His carved image, he falls down before it and worships it, prays to it and says, deliver me, for you are my god.

They do not know nor understand why. He has shut their eyes so that they cannot see and their hearts so that they cannot understand. And no one considers in his heart.

Nor is there knowledge or understanding to say, I've burned half of it in the fire and I've baked my bread on its coals. I've roasted meat and eaten it. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood? He feeds on ashes.

A deceived heart has turned him aside and he cannot deliver his soul nor say, is there not a lie in my right hand? Remember these, O Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant. I have formed you. You are my servant.

O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out like a thick cloud your transgressions and like a cloud your sins. Return to me for I have redeemed you.

This is a result. If you read the context here, why is it that this man is so far astray and blind to his own lack of common sense? Because a deceived heart has turned him aside and God has blinded him. He is in the midst of discipline.

And this picture is put here in Isaiah to point out to Israel, look how ridiculous this is. And once this period of discipline is complete, God will remove this blindness and they will be able to see the senselessness of how far they have fallen. This happens to us today.

We often find in the midst of our disobedience or apathy, how far we have strayed. And when we wake up to this, when we turn our heart and say, you know, I really need to go and seek the Lord. I've made a mess of my life.

I've made a mess of everything and I am miserable. And I'm a believer, things shouldn't be this way. When we turn our heart, suddenly we see where we went astray and the foolishness of the things that we have relied on for strength and the foolishness of the solutions we have turned to our problems.

And we awaken to this once we turn our deceived heart back toward the Lord and acknowledge Him as our source and our creator and our sustainer. When the heart turns, the perception follows. When the heart turns away, God will take away our ability to perceive and we do senseless, really stupid things.

And we get to a certain point and it's a part of our discipline. And that discipline is designed to wake us up and it runs a term, it runs its course. And we studied this in the past.

This has been presented under the idea of scar tissue of the soul or reversionism or reverse process reversionism where you can be rebellious and apathetic to the point that you cannot immediately turn back to the Lord. And it's a process whereby that scar tissue is removed and you're once again restored to function and to the opportunity to grow and be productive in God's plan. And those things are valid.

And this is the principle that those studies focused on. And we see it right here. And it's the key to understanding Romans 9, 10, 11 because Israel is the people of God has fallen under this principle of disobedience and reversionism as a nation, if you will.

And there has been a remnant all along who understood righteousness by faith and has been fruitful and has been protected and preserved by God. But the rest have been blinded and hardened. God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear to this very day.

And their table has become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. What was the table in Israel? It was the law of Moses. That was the word of God to them.

The law and the prophets and the writings were their nourishment and their sustenance. And instead, the very thing that was designed to sustain them because of their apathy and their disobedience and their faithlessness, that very thing, that table that was supposed to nourish and sustain them has become their stumbling block and their trap and their snare. What is the trap and the snare that Israel needs to be delivered from? It's the law.

It's their own table. It's their own source of nourishment and provision. That very thing has become a snare and a stumbling block.

What was it that that law foreshadowed? Where do you have the most complete Christology in the whole Bible? The law. They've stumbled over the law and in so doing, they've stumbled over Christ because the law pictures Christ. It amplifies and exemplifies Christ.

It pictures his redeeming work, his propitiatory work, his reconciling work, all of the aspects of restoration to fellowship and function and all of the things that Christ accomplished on the cross are pictured in the law. And by stumbling over the law, Israel as a nation stumbled over Christ. So now the question is in verse 11 of chapter 11 of Romans, have they stumbled so that they should fall? Certainly not.

But through their, and the new King James here says through their fall in Romans 11, 11. And if your Bible says that, you need to cross it out. This is not the word for fall.

This is paraptoma, P-A-R-A-P-T-O-M-A. And this is transgression. It's not through their fall.

I'm amazed. This is an exceptionally bad translation in the new King James. And it surprises me because this is generally a pretty good translation.

But here it's terrible. I say, then have they stumbled so that they should fall? Certainly not. Paul says they have not fallen.

But then this translation turns right around and says through their fall to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to them. There has been no fall. So you can't say through their fall because Paul says they haven't stumbled so as to fall.

They have stumbled, but they haven't fallen. So you can't say through their fall. And this is through their transgression.

There's a better translation here. Through their transgression. It's not their lack of salvation.

What is it that Paul is talking about here? He says, my prayer for Israel is that they be delivered. They have a zeal for God, but not according to righteousness. They have stumbled and they need deliverance from that stumbling.

But it's no wonder that people have such a difficult time understanding Romans when you get

down here and he says, I say, have they stumbled so that they should fall? But through their stumbling or through their transgression to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. What is being contrasted here? By this time, if you start reading some of the commentaries and things, it's just a hopeless, murky tangle. And people, in fact, a lot of commentators who are not very sold on the whole idea of inspiration and the ministry of God, the Holy Spirit, superintending the scriptures say, Paul got confused in his own argument here.

They can't understand what Paul is arguing and they don't think Paul understood it either. Some of them say, Paul hadn't really figured out what his conclusion was going to be when he was writing down this argument. And he kind of figures it out for himself as he goes along.

What a blasphemous thing to say. There's no confusion and there's no muddy water here. It's a consistent picture.

Israel as believers, Israel as believers have failed as a vineyard to bear the good fruit and they've suffered discipline and yet there's a remnant. So has Israel stumbled? In stumbling, have they fallen? Certainly not. They haven't fallen clear out of the plan of God.

Israel in its worst day in the Old Testament reaped the full consequences of their disobedience. They received the discipline from God, but God always follows that discipline with the promise of restoration, doesn't he? Why can he promise these same ones that are being disciplined that they will be restored? Because they're believers. And as far down as they fall and as many bad grapes as they produce, they never cease to be God's vineyard and they never cease to be his possession because they're believers and they're secure.

And they stumble and they disobey and they reap the consequences of that, which is severe discipline, hardness and blindness and everything else, but they never fall clear out of God's hands. But through their transgression to provoke them to jealousy, deliverance comes to the Gentiles. What an amazing concept.

That's where we'll pick up next time. What does this mean? Through the stumbling of believing Israel, salvation or deliverance comes to the Gentiles. We'll take a look at that next Sunday.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the revelation of your character, your essence, and your plan and purpose for us in the pages of Scripture. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will enlighten us by these things.

We pray that our motivation to be fruitful in your plan will be enhanced as we study these things. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.