

THE DANGER OF UNBELIEF AND THE SAFETY OF FAITH

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ROM 11

In Romans 11, Paul is addressing the problem of Jewish unbelief and the faith of the Gentiles who have believed. Essentially Paul reminds the Romans that the reason that Israel refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, and to bow before Him as Savior and Lord, was simply a case of God blinding the minds of the Jews so that He could have mercy on the rest of the world. It was God making a choice to reject his historic children so that he could have mercy on all his other children. However, Paul tells us, God chose a remnant from among the Jews, a faithful remnant, on which to build the church. But this blindness of the Jews was only for a season, asserts Paul, until the fullness of the Gentiles is fulfilled. Then all Israel would be saved, all of the Jewish nation would have the blindness removed from their eyes, and this special time for Israel would also be a special time for all believers.

Clearly, however, Paul says that the real reason for Israel's fall was un-belief. When the Messiah appeared, they rejected Him out of unbelief. When their Lord and Redeemer came they scorned Him and finally crucified Him. They were filled with unbelief, but their unbelief was indeed the good fortune of the Gentiles – but it was still unbelief.

Then Paul reminds those Roman Christians, many perhaps Jews like himself, that it was through faith that they themselves stood, and that they could easily be rejected by God if they also fell into unbelief. After all, Paul argues, the Jews were the original olive tree and the Gentiles were grafted in. God could easily graft the Jews back into the olive tree, and one day He would surely do so. Faith and Unbelief, then, and in one there is great danger, in the other, there is great security. Faith brings life; unbelief brings death.

Let us look at unbelief and faith to prove our point that unbelief holds great danger while faith gives great security.

I. UNBELIEF BRINGS DEATH

The great problem with unbelief is the great danger that it puts us in. Unbelief and rebellion through unbelief was the original sin of mankind. Our first parents were close to God, but as Paul writes in Romans, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." In that first chapter of Romans, we are shown how unbelief came upon the human race. We changed the truth of God into a lie; and God gave us over. How many has that happened to?

A. We Can First Assert that Unbelief Alienates us from God. Listen to the conclusion of Romans 1: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful; Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which do such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

In the clear light of Scripture, how can we assert any goodness of our own? We are not good. There is none good. Everyone partakes of that awful stench of sin, but thanks be to God, when we believed that stench was mostly taken away. Whereas we once were a stench in the nostrils of a holy God, now we are the sweet smelling odor of Christ. True, we often fail. However, our Savior lived a perfect life. We Christians partake of that perfect life through our faith. We often fail, and dishonor Christ, and demean ourselves. But because of Christ's sacrifice, we are not of the world. And therefore we are to God a beautiful and pleasing odor, a sweet smelling savor of Christ. Lev. 2: 2: And he shall bring it to Aaron's sons the priests: and he shall take thereout his handful of the flour thereof, and of the oil thereof, with all the frankincense thereof; and the priest shall burn the memorial of it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the LORD. 1 Cor 2: 14: Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. 15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

Yet, unbelief has made man God's enemy, for our unbelief has alienated us from God. Unbelief closes the door to God's Presence and thus to God's mercy. We are all prodigals. We have all come short of the glory of God. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." We just as surely defy God as did our first parents, and sometimes our defiance is loud and boisterous. When the infidel Robert G. Ingersoll was delivering his lectures against Christ and the Bible, his oratorical ability usually assured him of a large crowd. One night after an inflammatory speech in which he severely attacked man's faith in the Savior, he dramatically took out his watch and said, "I'll give God a chance to prove that He exists and is almighty. I challenge Him to strike me dead within 5 minutes!" First there was silence, then people became uneasy. Some left the hall, unable to take the nervous strain of the occasion, and one woman fainted. At the end of the allocated time, the atheist exclaimed derisively, "See! There is no God. I am still very much alive!"

After the lecture a young fellow said to a Christian lady, "Well, Ingersoll certainly proved something tonight!" Her reply was memorable. "Yes, he did," she said. "He demonstrated that even the most defiant sinner cannot exhaust the patience of the Lord in just 5 minutes!" Another man added, "As I was coming downtown today, a belligerent little fellow came running out of an alley, daring me to hit him. Do you suppose I actually struck him, just because he challenged me to do so? In the same way, our Lord will not strike everyone dead who defies Him. We should be thankful that in this age He

is still operating in grace and desires to show His love rather than His wrath." (Romans 9:22)

B. Unbelief not only Alienates us from God, Unbelief exposes us to the Wrath of God. The Bible says, Rom 1: 18: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" The Bible also says, Heb 10: 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Deut 4: 24 For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.

The anger and wrath of God are subjects we'd rather not talk about, but they are nevertheless subjects that we must deal with. God is holy. He hates sin. Sin makes Him angry. Why? Because He loves mankind and knows that sin is the great destroyer of mankind. God loves your soul and He knows better than anyone the effects of sin on your soul. So He is righteously angry with sin every single day. Had it not been for sin death would not have entered the world. Had it not been for sin there would be no wars and fighting, stealing and killing, lying and cheating. Had it not been for sin the sinless Son of God would not have had to die for us.

But even now sin brings down the wrath of God upon us. Just as the rain falls from heaven, God's wrath comes upon men and nations. The Bible says, "The wicked shall be cast into hell, and all nations that forget God." God is disgusted with the sinner, and He is angry at man's sin. The Bible says, "Be sure your sins will find you out." How does sin find us out? It is found out by the wrath of God that is being revealed upon us for our sin. We never get away with sin. It shows in our countenance; it shows in our conversation; it shows in our character! Gods' wrath is real! Gods' anger is holy! Gods' judgment is sure. When we think we are safe from the holy God, we hear His voice in the evening crying out to us. We never escape the righteous judgment of a Holy God. He is a consuming fire and comes like a firestorm to consume His enemies. His justice and judgment are like a flowing ocean of lava that consumes everything in its way. Righteous, holy, Love does not seek to consume the sinner, but to purify from sin. God's Love destroys the great destroyer of man, namely, sin.

Jonathan Edwards said, (It is for the) "awakening unconverted persons to a conviction of their danger. This that you have heard is the case of every one out of Christ. That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything to take hold of, there is nothing between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you."

One notable Bible expositor explained the Wrath of God like this:

Surely this phrase: "The 'Wrath of God' is greatly misunderstood. Many think invariably of some sort of peeved deity – a kind of cosmic-terrible tempered Mr. Bang who indulges in violent uncontrolled displays of temper when human beings do not do what they ought to do. But such a concept only reveals the limitations of our understanding."

“The Bible never deals with the Wrath of God that way. According to the scriptures, the Wrath of God is God's moral integrity. When man refuses to yield himself to God, he creates certain conditions not only for himself but for others as well which God has ordained for harm. It is God who makes evil result in sorrow, heartache, injustice and despair. It is God's way of saying to man, "Look, you must face the truth: You were made for Me. If you decide that you don't want Me, then you will have to bear the consequences." The absence of God is destructive to human life. That absence is God's Wrath and God cannot withhold it. In His moral integrity, He insists that these things should occur as a result of our disobedience. He sets man's sin and His Wrath in the same frame.”

C. The Third Danger of Unbelief is that it sends us to Hell! Edwards was a bit too graphic in his depiction of sinners in the hands of an angry God, but he was absolutely right in his conclusions. Being a bad person does not take us to hell. We go hell because of unbelief. Just as the Jews lost God's blessings because of unbelief, lost the salvation that was meant for the Jews, even so we lose the blessing of God through our unbelief. When we close the door to God's blessings, we open the door to God's wrath. If we refuse to open the door to God's blessing we will suffer eternal rejection by a Holy God, who in His Integrity cannot abide sin. A perfectly Righteous God cannot count a sinner as righteous without violating His own Righteousness. Therefore, He forgives us in the sacrifice of His Only Son, who lived a perfect life, which God counts as our life as believers. If the Prodigal Son had never returned to his father, he would have died without the love and forgiveness that he found when he returned back to his father's house. In Christ we return to the Heavenly Father and find His Loving Acceptance.

The Bible speaks about this danger as being a reprobate before God and of being turned over to a reprobate mind. Rom1:28: And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 2 Tim.3: 8: Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. Titus 1: 16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

We can sin away our day of grace; we can lose the opportunity to be saved by continual unbelief; there does come a time when God says, "Too Late! Too Late!" But I remind you again that hell is just such a state where the sinner closes the door to God's mercy, and, over time, locks that door and throws away the key. The Bible tells us that hell is a reality.

Psa. 9: 17 The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.

(Prov 15:11 KJV) Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?

(Prov 15:24 KJV) The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.

(Mat 23:33 KJV) Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

(Luke 10:15 KJV) And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.

(Luke 16:23 KJV) And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

(Rev 20:14 KJV) And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.(Rev 20:15 KJV) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Oh my dear friend there is great danger in our unbelief. We are in danger of alienation, God's wrath, and hell itself. The lost person who refuses to believe in Jesus is like a golf player in a lightning storm with metal spikes in the ground, holding his iron club into the air, defying the lightning to strike. Perhaps God will show you the mercy that He showed Ingersoll, but perhaps not.

II. CORRESPONDINGLY, HOWEVER, THERE IS GREAT SAFETY IN FAITH.

Because:

A. Faith Brings Salvation. Jesus said once, to the woman of Samaria, "Salvation is of the Jews." God's gift of salvation was offered first to the Jews. In their unbelief they turned their backs upon their God and God, in His mercy, turned His Face to the Gentiles. That first happened in the life of Cornelius, and what shock it was to Peter to find out God actually loved the Gentile Centurion enough to send him, a Jew, to preach to him and his family. Then Peter was shocked again that God saved and filled that Gentile family with the Holy Spirit. They shouted praises to God in tongues that only the believers could understand. They were deliriously happy in their salvation. As a good Jew, Peter had to defend himself before his Jewish brethren for going to the Gentiles with the Gospel. Later, Paul preached at Ephesus and there the Gentiles were baptised again in the Holy Spirit. In fact, in Acts 15, Paul preached to the church and explained to them how God worked with the Gentiles through him. The Gospel was for the nations! That they understood quite well. (Acts 14:27 KJV) And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. The religion of Israel had become a Universal Religion.

Acts 15---- 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Eph 2: 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

B. We stand by Faith. Clearly the Bible tells us that even in life we cannot stand as Christians apart from faith. Nor can we fulfill the command to love without faith. Gal 5: 6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. As the Bible says, "We walk by faith, not by sight."

Gal 2: 20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

As children bring their broken toys
With tears for us to mend,
I brought my broken dreams to God,
Because He was my friend.
But then, instead of leaving Him
In peace, to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
In ways that were my own.
Finally I took them back and said,
"Dear God, why are you so slow?"
"My child," He said, "what could I do?
You never did let go."

C. Faith, finally, gives us eternal life in Heaven. None of us knows exactly how Heaven will be. For me, it is the perfection of all things, the perfection of humanity, the perfection of nature, the perfection of the social order. E. Stanley Jones once explained Heaven as ‘a perfect human being in a perfect society.’ That is good enough for me. I recently came upon this illustration:

“A child of God who was seriously ill and lacked assurance of salvation said to his physician, "Doctor, although I'm a Christian, I'm afraid to die. Exactly what happens to us in the hour of death?" The surgeon, who was also a believer, thought for a moment and then replied, "I'm afraid I can't give you an exact answer to that question!" As he walked across the room to leave, he desperately wished he could say something comforting. Pausing briefly before opening the door, he heard the sound of scratching and whining on the other side. Suddenly he realized that he had left his car window open and his little dog had jumped out. With the patient's permission he let in his pet poodle who leaped on him with an eager show of gladness. In a flash the doctor's mind was awakened to a scriptural truth he had never before put into words. Turning to the sick man, he said, "Did you see how my dog acted? He's never been in this room before. He had no idea what was inside; yet when I opened the door, he sprang in without fear, for he knew his master was here! As Christians we have not been told about the glories that await us on the other side of death. But one thing we do know; our Master is there, and that is enough!" John the Revelator described it like this:

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

Before His death and Resurrection, Jesus told His disciples:14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Unbelief brings death and destruction; faith brings life and life more abundantly.
I choose Life; I choose faith; I choose Jesus!