

ROMANS

11:1-36

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 7th May 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Genesis 17:1-8

Introduction

We're in the book of Romans — the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome — and he's been giving us quite a lesson from the Old Testament. In chapters 9-10 he quoted from 10 separate books, and now in chapter 11 he'll quote from some of those again, plus 2 more (namely 1 Kings and Jeremiah). But don't think "well, of course Paul knew scripture — he needed to, for he was called to be an Apostle, a pastor, a Bible teacher, and to write scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit" — and then conclude that knowing the Bible is only important for those that teach it.

For in Acts 6 we see the notable division of labour where a complaint had arisen that the Greek widows in the church were being neglected in the daily practical things, and so 7 godly men were sought out, prayed for, and given responsibility for such things. Their requirement? That they were of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit. Their example? Well, we find Stephen, one of those chosen for this *practical* work — who we're told was full of faith and the Holy Spirit — he gave one of the most comprehensive sermons in the New Testament. He knew scripture very well indeed!

The point I'm making, is that however you serve the Lord — and we are *all* to serve Him — you should know the Bible well. That's true regardless of whether you teach the Bible, show hospitality, or enable the ministry of others, or serve in other practical ways.

Indeed, only yesterday you may have heard these words said to King Charles III at his Coronation:

SIR, to keep you ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, receive this Book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this is the royal Law; these are the lively Oracles of God.

The Bible is indeed the most valuable thing that this world affords.

Chapter overview of Romans

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- **Chapters 1-8:** Christian doctrine
 - Sin (1-3), Salvation (4-5), Sanctification (6-8)
- **Chapters 9-11:** Israel
 - Israel - Past (9), Present (10), Future (11)
- **Chapters 12-16:** Practical Christian living
 - Practical Christianity

Now, we have got as far as chapter 11 and, in this section of Romans, Paul has been writing about Israel. Why? Because if God could break His promises to them, then He could break His promises to us. And so there have been some important lessons to learn already in these chapters where Paul uses the Jew as an illustration of the faithfulness of God. That is, God is faithful even when His people are fickle. He will not go back on His promises.

In chapter 9, Paul noted Israel's past behaviour and the sovereignty of God, then in chapter 10 he talked about Israel's present state and man's responsibility.

Overview of chapter eleven

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- **v1-10** — God has not finished with Israel, not all Israel has finished with God
- **v11-24** — Israel's disobeyed, but Gentiles grafted in by faith
- **v25-36** — Israel will also be grafted in by faith

And now, in chapter 11 he'll start by saying that God is not finished with Israel, nor is all Israel finished with God. Then from verses 11-24 he'll show that it was through Israel's disobedience that the gospel was brought to the Gentiles, that we might be saved by faith — and that by that taking place, it might provoke them to come to Christ in faith also (concluding in verses 25-36 that indeed we'll see many Jews come to know Jesus as their Saviour).

Chapter eleven

So then, knowing a little of where we're headed this morning, let's study this chapter together, starting in verse 1, where we read:

Romans 11:1

I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul asks "has God cast off Israel completely and permanently?". The answer is so clear; God has not done away with Israel. Indeed, Paul offers himself as an example — saying "If God had done away with all Jews, then what about me? For being of the tribe of Benjamin I'm as Jewish as it can get, yet am saved by faith". And of course, there were the disciples, the apostles, the 3000 saved at Pentecost and many others in the early church were Jewish.

Besides, God wasn't going to go back on His promise to Abraham in Genesis 17 where we read:

Genesis 17:7-8

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

When God elsewhere tells Abraham that through him *all* the nations will be blessed, that's speaking of us. But when He talks about covenants and lands (such as here) — He's talking about Abraham's biological descendants; that is (in a single word) Israel.

You may recall that a couple of weeks ago I noted that, sadly, not all churches believe this. That is, they believe God *has* indeed finished with Israel. Why is that the case? A few reasons. There are some historical ones I'll come to later, but one to mention here is that some need to teach this in order to support their view of the end times — specifically, that since there is no mention of the church during the Tribulation period, yet they believe it *will* go through it, they have to replace Israel with the church and thus apply all that is spoken of about Israel in the book of Revelation to the church instead.

But Romans 11 makes it abundantly clear that God has not done away with Israel, nor has the church replaced it. Indeed we read on in verse 2...

Romans 11:2-3

God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"?

Paul confirms again; God has not finished with Israel. And even though some of Israel may have finished with God, there are still those who follow Him. And Paul uses the example of Elijah, who right after he stood alone for God at the top of Mt Carmel, calling down fire from Heaven and destroying 450 prophets of Baal, then found himself persecuted by Jezebel. And, as Paul quotes, he cried out to God as we read in 1 Kings 19:

1 Kings 19:10

So he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Paul continues:

Romans 11:4

But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

That is, Elijah was not aware of everything God was doing, and He had, in fact, reserved 7000 others who were loyal to Him.

There's much lesson for us in that, to not be despondent thinking we're on our own in serving the Lord. But the point Paul makes is that there is precedent for God keeping a remnant that are true to Him and His Word, and he writes:

Romans 11:5

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

So just as God had reserved a remnant for Himself then, so has He now — both at the time when Paul was writing, and also at our time today.

Of course, back in chapter 9 Paul wrote "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel", going on to say that it wasn't the children of the flesh, but those of the promise that were counted as the seed - making the point that it was not by works, but by faith. And here he says the same, that the remnant isn't according to works, but through the election of grace. The remnant today being composed of those Jews who have accepted Christ as their Saviour.

So then, since God has saved *us* by His grace, why would we have any issue with *Israel* being saved by His grace? Sure, Israel didn't deserve it - but neither did we Gentiles. We were all condemned before God because of our sin against Him. None of us deserved God's mercy and grace. But each of us can partake of it if we come to Him in repentance and faith.

Yet, there there is nasty whiff of anti-semitism that pervades the church today. Its roots of course go back to Genesis 3, where Satan set himself against God, and subsequently tried to destroy the line through to Christ; whether trying to destroy Israel entirely through the tribes of giants, or Egypt's persecution, or in part - such as Herod's murder of all the babies under 2. And when not only that failed, but so did his attempt to destroy Christ, he once more focussed his efforts on destroying Israel, because they are the very reason for Christ's return, when He will set up His kingdom as Messiah and sit on the throne of David as prophesied.

What's crazy, is how effectively Satan has even used people in the church to aid his cause. You see, all of the original church fathers for at least the first century and a half had believed the future of the church was directly linked to the future of Israel. It's not until the 2nd century that this idea that God had finished with Israel crept into the church. Augustine adopted that position, and then the Catholic church developed the ideas that the priesthood had transferred to the church.

If you want to understand the background to some of this, there is a book by David A Rausch called *The legacy of hatred* in which he writes...

It is tragic that even the great reformer Martin Luther was eventually seduced by all the anti-Jewish propaganda of his time. Although in his earlier ministry Luther wrote a most sympathetic tract acknowledging the shameful way the church had treated the Jews, and urged kind treatment of them, in later life he wrote another tract that was the complete opposite...

David A Rausch

Now this isn't to say we throw everything of Luther out. Luther was an amazing man. Even fair to describe as a genius, who translated the Greek New Testament to German in less than 10 weeks while also writing 6 letters/diatribes to the Catholic church. He took 35 dialects of German, narrowed them down to 18, and then for each word he translated from the Greek into German he took the most common word. He basically invented modern German. And by the time he died there were 1 million copies of his Old and New Testaments in circulation in Germany.

However, regarding Israel he capitulated to the official view of the church; seeing them as troublemakers, as having crucified the Messiah. In fact it's shocking to see how far Luther went with this. These are his words:

What then shall we Christians do with this damned, rejected race of Jews. Since they live among us and we know about their lying and blasphemy and cursing we cannot tolerate them if we do not wish to share in their lies, cursing and blasphemy. We must prayerfully and reverentially practice a merciful severity. Let me give you my honest advice.

First, to set their synagogues or schools on fire and then bury and cover with dirt what will not burn. So that no man will never again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honour of our Lord and of Christendom.

Second, I advise that their houses be raised and destroyed.

Third, I advise that all their prayer books and talmudic writings in which idolatry lies, and blasphemy and cursing (IS) be taken from them.

Fourth. I advise that their Rabbis be forbidden to teach on pain of loss of life and limb.

Fifth. I advise that safe conduct on the highways be abolished for the Jews for they have no business in the countryside since they are not Lords officials or tradesmen. Let them stay at home.

Of course, you have to ask; what home?!

Sixth. I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and silver and Gold be taken from them and put aside for safe keeping.

Seventh. I recommend putting a flail or axe, or hoe or distaff or a spindle in the hand of the young strong jews or jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.

The encyclopaedia Judaica says of Luthers tract: *"Short of Auschwitz and it's oven and extermination, the whole Nazi holocaust is pre-outlined here. Is it any wonder that Adolf Hitler and Julias Streicher quoted Luther as justification for their final solution for the jews."*

Indeed, it's shocking to read. And shocking that such views made their way into church history. And today the church at large doesn't understand that the this doctrine of replacement theology gave rise to antagonism in the church that Satan quickly grabbed hold of and produced the holocaust.

This is why we need to listen very carefully to what Paul is saying here, which is that the way in which both Jews and Gentiles can come to God is the same. That is, it is by God's grace, and not our works. We read in verse 6 of Romans 11:

Romans 11:6

And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

So these Jewish Christians were not following God and receiving His approval through their works, or through His covenant with them, but rather through grace, by faith in Christ. And of course this points back to Romans chapter 4 where we read:

Romans 4:1-4

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

Paul asks, "what do we conclude?". We read:

Romans 11:7

What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

That is, Israel wanted a right relationship with God, but as a nation they went about pursuing it the wrong way. That is, by works. While some turned to faith in Christ, the rest were blinded. They could not see the forest for the trees. And Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:10 and Deuteronomy 29:4...

Romans 11:8

Just as it is written: "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."

Was this unfair? No – just look back at the example of Pharaoh that Paul gave in chapter 9, that God hardened his already voluntarily hardened heart. In the same way, Israel's eyes were blinded because they didn't *want* to see. And I've heard several people say they've witnessed to Jews at length, and they just don't want to see that Jesus is their Messiah – I've even seen that too with one lovely Jewish public speaker who had heard the gospel many times, but would not bring himself to accept it.

Paul now quotes from Psalm 69:22-23...

Romans 11:9-10

And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always."

In other words, all their material prosperity, even their customs and rituals, were held so dear to them that they — speaking of Israel nationally — couldn't see how unnecessary all that was for their salvation. God didn't force them against their will to approach Him in faith. And He won't force you.

Now, as we reach verse 11, Paul asks whether the Jews have stumbled to complete and eternal ruin. We read...

Romans 11:11

I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Again his response is perfectly simple and emphatic; they have not fallen into complete and eternal ruin. Rather, their stumbling, their false step, has opened up the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, of which we read in Acts 13...

Acts 13:46-48

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth." Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

But, we read here in Romans 11:11 that the reason for this was not only that the Gentiles might be saved (which had always been part of God's plan), but so that Israel might be saved too. How? By provoking them to jealousy. That is, that they might look at the Gentiles experiencing the blessings of God and the freedom of salvation that they thought could only come to them, and as such be moved to come to Christ themselves.

An analogy that may help is this; when you want a baby to eat what's on the spoon or tray you've put in front of them, but they show little interest, one thing that can help is to eat (or at least pretend to eat) some of their food in order to produce that "I want what you've got feeling". And that is what Paul is saying here, that as the Jews see the wondrous relationship we have with God, they may desire the same and eat what until that moment seem unpalatable to them.

Romans 11:12

Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

In other words, if we were blessed even by their disobedience, imagine how wonderful it will be when they turn to Jesus as their Messiah. What joy and blessing that will be to all!

Romans 11:13-14

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

While Paul was called to preach the gospel the Gentiles, he had such a heart for his own countrymen, that they would be saved too. We also read of this in 1 Corinthians chapter 9:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Oh that we would both have a heart for that which the Lord has called us to, and also a heart for those who are near and dear to us! But also, may we have a heart for whom God has a heart for — including the only nation he has ever chosen; Israel.

Romans 11:15

For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

Those who wish to replace Israel with the church fail to see what a blessing it will be as Israel turn to Him!

Romans 11:16-18

For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

So then, Paul refers to the principle found in Numbers chapter 15, where the Israelites were to bring the first portion of their dough to the Lord, sanctifying the remainder. A principle that we'd do well to apply to giving our first and our best to the Lord also - whether with our time, or our money. Lessons we learn from Malachi and Haggai too.

But here specifically Paul speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being the first fruits of the nation of Israel, that just as they were set apart for the Lord, and were to receive His blessing — so too was the nation that followed them. And subsequently us too, as we find that Abraham is our father in the faith also, that indeed in him we are blessed through God saving us by faith, just as he accounted Abraham's faith as righteousness to him.

Romans 11:19-21

You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.

This is not a question of eternal security for the true Christian, but rather I believe Paul is saying that just as God didn't spare an apostate Israel, neither will he spare an apostate church — that is, one that is living contrary to His will and His ways. As an example, we see contrasting examples in the book of Revelation in the churches Jesus writes to in chapters 2 & 3. The church of Philadelphia kept His word, and Jesus said He would keep them from the hour of temptation (that is, the Tribulation). But to the church in Laodicea He wrote "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." A church that is just playing church, is not a church at all.

Romans 11:22-23

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

God has, in His sovereignty, called those He knows will turn to Him. That as they accept Him as their Saviour of their own free will, it is He that gets the glory for His mercy and grace, and not them for any kind of works or effort on their part. And his goodness is shown not only in his grace, but in that He wants all to come to know Him, as we read in 2 Peter 3:9...

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

And oh what love He has for Israel:

Romans 11:24

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Imagine how much sense the Old Testament, which is all religious Jews have, makes sense once they realise Jesus is their Messiah! What an Aha! moment when they realise that we all — Jews and Gentiles — can be saved by faith, just as Abraham's faith was accounted to him for righteousness.

So when will this happen? When will Israel as a nation turn to God again? Paul, writing largely to non-Jewish believers in Rome says he doesn't want them (or us) to be ignorant about this topic...

Romans 11:25

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

That is, this national blindness on Israel is temporary. That God has not finished with them. And that we should not be ignorant of this. How perplexing it is then, that many Bible colleges in this country (and elsewhere) teach *contrary* to this! Should you go to one, be careful to choose one that actually holds fast to the Bible.

Of course, as individuals we *also* should not be ignorant that while *individually* there is nothing to *stop* Jews coming to know the Lord, *nationally* they are in this fog right now - they can't see the forest for the trees. But when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (which is that moment the last Gentile believer is saved), the church will be raptured, and all hell will break loose (so to speak) — *then* they will quickly turn to Jesus who alone can save them, as they cry out for their Messiah. And He'll return for them, defeating their enemies, and saving them.

Romans 11:26-27

And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."

Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20 which says:

Isaiah 59:20

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," Says the LORD.

That is, even then it will be those that turn from transgression, from sin, to the Lord. The fog, this blindness, will have been lifted, but they must still approach Him in faith - and all who do so will be saved.

Paul now wraps up these 3 chapters where he has talked about Israel, and writes:

Romans 11:28

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

So, nationally Israel were wholeheartedly opposed to the gospel — they did not want to accept Jesus as their Messiah. But that actually worked to our benefit in that the good news of the gospel was then preached to the Gentiles. But, as we've read, there was a remnant that *did* choose to believe — and they are beloved because of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob; promises that will still be fulfilled in and for them as a nation.

Romans 11:29

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

What a comfort this is! Just as God will not go back on His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – so God will not change His mind over those He has called to Him from the Gentiles. It is that unchanging nature of God that gives us confidence that there is nothing that can separate us from His love. Nothing at all. Israel are the example of this, that Paul sets before us.

Romans 11:30-31

For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.

That is, Israel rejected the mercy of God shown through the gospel of grace, and so it was preached the Gentiles. The gentiles accepted it (at least some of them, some of us, did) and now that same mercy, that same grace will save Israel. Not through works, but through faith. Just as we have been saved by faith.

Romans 11:32

For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

Once more, that is, God handed them over in their willing disobedience, that the gospel may also be preached to the Gentiles — not that the Gentiles only might be saved, but Israel also, by being provoked to jealousy through seeing the mercy, grace, freedom and relationship with God of the Gentile believer. And indeed, that of the church.

Paul now pretty much explodes here as he considers all that God has done through his mercy and grace for wretches like us – disobedient Jews and disobedient Gentiles alike. That we might be justified, sanctified and glorified. Not through works that we have done, but through faith in what He has done. He writes:

Romans 11:33

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!

That is, how incredible God's plan of mercy and grace through which He has given opportunity to every person to be saved, to be forgiven of their sin!

He now quotes twice more from the Old Testament:

Romans 11:34-35

"For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counsellor?" "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"

How could we hope to know all that God knows? How could we dare to think that we could offer the God (who created everything) our advice?! Paul quotes first from Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:13

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counsellor has taught Him?

We can't offer God any advice, at least nothing that would actually be helpful — we may try, but it's foolish to do so, thinking that God who made everything we see and Who holds the entire universe together somehow needs our advice!

Next, he quotes Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 23:18

For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, And has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it?

We see similar comments from David and Job too. And oh, how wonderful the kindness God has already shown to us. We cannot out-give God in anything — whether time, money, love, or anything else. We'll never put Him in the position of "owing us one".

Romans 11:36

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

God created all we see. He gave us life. He sent His son to die for our sin. And gave us new life! And oh how we should want to praise Him forever.

Conclusion

What a way to finish this chapter! What a way to finish this section of Romans! And we might think, what a way to finish this letter. Because Paul could have stopped here, right? But he didn't. And as we'll see in the remaining 5 chapters of this letter, God has set out a right way for us to live — not to earn our salvation, but in response to it.

This is summarised in the first half of Ephesians chapter 2:

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Application questions

As always, it's important that our times of Bible study don't merely fill us with *information*, but that we might make *application* of what we read and hear. So at minimum, consider these two things as you go into this week:

- Is your walk with the Lord so healthy that others would look at you and want the same?
 - Do you give God the praise He is due? Does your life match your lips?
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