

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 The Depth of the Riches
Genesis 45:1-15
August 16, 2026

To elect something is to choose. It doesn't really mean more than that. And perhaps most of the time, in a democracy that is constantly having elections, we think of it in that context. But there are other contexts.

There is the theological arena. God's choice, for instance, of Abraham to be the father of a great nation, and Sarah its mother, that through them all the nations of the world might be blessed, is called the Election.

In all the Calvinist debates that rankle people and cause divisions within the church at large, the term, "the elect," refers to those whom God has chosen for salvation. The election simply means that God *has* chosen to save, and some are saved.

For those in church contexts, the concept of the election can be quite controversial and lead to conflict, the idea of "double-predestination," a Limited Atonement, on the one hand, that does not present God in an acceptable way; and on the other hand, idea of a universal atonement that *can go so far* as to conclude that everyone is saved, which mocks the idea that the way life is lived matters.

Sadly, many have been hurt in these conversations, and participated in judging and being judged, in

schisms that dot the history of church in modern times. This should not be so.

In three chapters of Romans, Paul addresses this question in terms of his experience of accepting Jesus as the Christ of Jewish hope, while others among his fellow Israelites refuse that acceptance.

Given that God's election of Abraham's descendants and its extension of the blessing to the gentiles was being played out in real time, how is one to understand this rejection?

In the 9th through the 11th chapters of his letter to the church at Rome, Paul labors, sometimes apparently contradicting himself, to explain how the election still stands for those of his faith family who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah, which is in the main, most of them.

He calls it a mystery! In words previous to those read today, Paul speaks of the Election itself as a *mystery*.

Romans 11:25-28 - I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved . . . As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs."

At the very least, the concept of a mystery involves unanswered questions. We all, all people, much less believers, live in the context of unanswered questions. Let us get sidetracked here for a few minutes.

The things of God have been spoken about in terms of mystery in other places in the bible. One might think of Isaiah 40:13, which Paul quotes in the doxology at the end of the 11 chapter, “Who can fathom the Spirit of the Lord, or instruct the Lord as his counselor?

Or in the great chapter on love when he speaks of seeing through a glass darkly, and partial knowledge. (1 Corinthians 13).

Or again in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

When Paul speaks the Resurrection of the Dead, he uses the same word, “mystery.”

1 Corinthians 15 - “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”

Even though Paul believes that the solution to this mystery has been revealed in Christ Jesus, it still retains its mysterious quality. There are two ways to reflect; it has been revealed that we are in the presence of mystery; and that the solution is still unknown in its essence.

There is a high and magnificent nature to God’s grace that will always go beyond the reach of human understanding, and like Job or Isaiah or Paul, we must learn to be silent before that which we cannot understand; depths we cannot fathom; heights we cannot reach.

Thus is explained why Paul concludes this section of his letter with such an exclamation as he does, a doxology that attempts to say what can only poorly be said.

Perhaps that is the reason that Christians argue about almost everything, every aspect of grace and faith, bible and theology, ecclesiology and worship; because we desire the mysteries solved, but have been told to embrace the mystery of grace as itself grand and wonderful and miraculous.

We should be merciful to each other because God’s grace stretches us beyond the human capacity for reason. This dynamic is the central feature of the Book of Genesis, where Creation and Election are presented also as mystery, higher than human ways and thoughts.

The story of Joseph and his brothers, the resolution to which we have heard in our presence today, reveals a similar truth about the theological reflections of the Israelite people. The coming together of Jacob's favoritism and Joseph's sense of superiority and the resentments of his brothers who fake his death and lie to their father, team up to send Joseph to Egypt in servitude.

There he interprets dreams and is unjustly imprisoned and then unlikely lifted to the heights of power, the result of which is the preservation of the chosen family in a time of crisis caused by a great famine.

How could so many hard and difficult and even sinful things combine to such a blessed result? And the crucifixion of Jesus? How could it be anything other than mysterious that a gruesome but common method of capital punishment became the Redemption of the world?

For Paul, it means that the Election of Israel can't be revoked or diminished no matter their failures, or how we fail to understand it. What can we do but shutter in silence before it?

So after winding through these chapters Paul ends in doxology, convinced that God's grace covers it all, embraces humanity in this situation of vulnerability. The Christian character we seek is beyond our reach, nonetheless we have been called to seek it; integrity, honesty, generosity, compassion, patience, kindness, goodness in all things.

The degree that it is attained, we attribute to God's grace and not our seeking. Chosen by grace and not merit, painfully and woefully short on any standard of achievement, we are yet deeply loved, and though faced with an impossible demand are given miraculously into countless mercies.

Do not underestimate the grace of the living God. Be open to it, accepting of it even when life is stretched all out of proportion. Knowing only of human weakness and divine strength, let it lead to humble and grateful devotion and the pursuit of as much goodness as we find ourselves able;

Let us pray, and let our prayer be in the words of the doxology that ends these chapters:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!

"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"

"Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"

For from him and through him and for him *are all things*. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Romans 11:1-2a; 29-32

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

29 . . . for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Genesis 45:1-15

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save

lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you.

13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

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