



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 11:1-10

It is important to remember that Christ – on the cross – died for the entire world. We call this objective justification. Therefore, God does not reject humanity but has objectively accomplished salvation for all of humanity. But with that said, not all of humanity believes. Not all of humanity subjectively receives the gift of Christ by faith.

And so, it is important to remember that the Lord does not desire the eternal death of mankind. The Lord does not predestine people to hell. God does not repudiate mankind, but His arms are stretched out to all. The Promises of the Lord are not pushed aside by God.

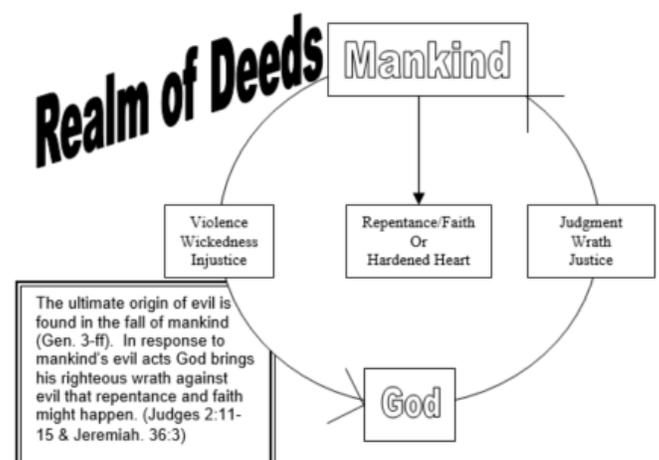
So why are not all people saved? It is quite simple; some are not saved because they reject God's salvation. And how do they reject the Lord's salvation? They reject it with unbelief.

But what about God hardening hearts as stated in Romans chapter 11, verse seven and verse 20? Well, God does harden the hearts of mankind as an act of His judgment and wrath against unbelief.

Consider for a moment Pharaoh in the Old Testament book of Exodus. The Lord certainly hardened Pharaoh's

heart, but He only did so after the sixth plague. In other words, God will judge the sin of unbelief by often giving a hard heart its desire – more hardening. God will often punish unbelief by withdrawing His Spirit so that people will be punished in the way they themselves choose. This is what God did with Pharaoh in the book of Exodus and what Paul is describing in Romans chapter 11.

But why does God punish the sin of unbelief with His wrath and judgment? Consider the chart below:



Keep in mind from the earlier portions of Romans that God's wrath is often administered by God giving people what they desire. In Romans chapter 1, Paul says that God gave them up to a debased mind and the things that should not be done. God's wrath was allowing mankind's free will to do whatever it wanted. And so a hardened heart against God will often receive the wrath and judgment of God, which is more hardening.

But this raises the question again, what is God's purpose of His wrath? The answer, God's wrath is ultimately to judge sin in a way that we are shattered to a thousand pieces and realize our need for grace. For example, God used the nation of Babylon to be a hammer to beat Judah into a thousand pieces the bring about the realization that they needed not themselves but the Lord.

What this means is that God is not to blame for unbelief and hard hearts. Salvation has been accomplished objectively for all. Salvation is subjectively delivered through Christ's church via the Word and Sacraments. However, unbelief and hardened hearts of individuals are what keeps them from salvation. To reveal their hardened heart, God will often meet their hardened hearts with his wrath of making their hearts even harder so that they might become undone and see their need of the Lord.

Understanding everything that we have said above, it can be very disheartening seeing individuals (or perhaps ourselves) blaming God for not helping us in our sinful unbelief. That is to say, all too often, individuals pursue not righteousness but sin, which results in God's judgment and wrath, which results in individuals being angry towards God's so-called lack of support in their lives. But why on earth should God honor and reward our unbelief?

We many times, cry foul towards God, saying, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" But the assumption is wrong, are we really good people? Perhaps a better question to ask is, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" Indeed, we must understand that if our hearts are hardened in unbelief, we are to blame; however, if we are basking in the goodness and forgiveness of Jesus, it is only by grace – a sheer gift for undeserving sinners.

The Lord is accomplishing salvation for all – objective justification. He chooses to deliver this salvation subjectively through His Word and Sacraments to be received by faith. And so, God is to be glorified for salvation but is certainly not to be blamed for our unbelief.

