

## God Picked You?

### Romans 11:13-15, 28-32 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup> I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry <sup>14</sup> in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

<sup>28</sup> 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, <sup>29</sup> for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup> Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Remember grade school recess, that wonderful slice of free time meant to burn off our energy after sitting and learning for a couple of hours in class? You got to play football, basketball, kickball, dodgeball, soccer, and the like with your classmates. Of course, playing these games required picking teams. You know how this works. First you get two team captains – probably either the star athletes of the school or the most popular kids. The rest of the kids line up. Those captains, in turn, make their picks. Logic would dictate that you pick the other very talented athletes first. You might buck the trend if the captain picked someone who wasn't a star athlete, but you knew they were picking a close friend. If not for that pick, there would be drama. After the talented and popular kids are picked, the captains would move on to the kids with heart and enthusiasm, but maybe not as talented as the other people already picked. They were good, middle of the road choices. They would help you win, even if they weren't the best. Then you get to the bottom tier, the kids you know you need to include or you would get a talking to from the teacher, and the selection seemed to be based on who you could tolerate most, who would be least likely to blow the game for your team. (BTW I was always the bottom tier in grade school. I knew my status.)

As we have gotten older, hopefully we have gotten kinder in picking our teams, but for the most part, we still pick people to be on our team who will give us the best chance of winning, people who will be the most help. That's how we pick teams, but how does God pick who's going to be on his team? This is basically the topic that Paul has undertaken in the better part of chapters 8-11 in his letter to the Christians in Rome.

In the previous chapters, he has already established that we all were at one time disobedient to God. In fact, we are born with a hostile nature to God and his Word. So, really, when it came to God picking teams, we were the spoil-sports who not only moaned and groaned about being picked for God's team, we flat refused to come over to his side. "I don't want to be a part of his team. I don't want to have to play by his rules. He's just a goodie-two-shoes. Can't I just be a free agent and play for whoever I feel like playing with when I want to play?"

Do you remember when that time was for you in your faith life? Do you remember fighting against living as God wants you to live, to think that God has all these pointless rules that hinder your happiness, that instead of following what he says, you were just going to do what you wanted to do, that you didn't want to be tied down to God by committing exclusively to his team, to leave your options open in case another offer from another team comes along, an offer you like better than being confined by God?

At some point in our lives, this is how we thought and acted about being on God's team. It's a constant temptation. Yet, he still chose us. He broke through that tough veneer that we put on, that self-help, lone wolf attitude that plays by his own rules and isn't tied down to a team. He showed us the strength and talents of his team with him as the star player. He outmatched everyone. He could win every game single-handedly. Being on his team meant being on the winning team, the most talented team. And here he was picking me, drafting me. I guess he saw my talents, my value, right?

Yes, God picked us to belong to his team, but, in a way, we weren't his first draft choice. As Jesus said in the Gospel reading to the Gentile Canaanite woman, the non-Jewish woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) We know, though, the rest of Jesus' story. We know that he came for the whole world, but he started with the Jews. And we know that the Jewish religious leaders rejected him. They didn't want to be on Jesus' team. They plotted and planned against him, resulting in the crucifixion of an innocent man on Calvary's mountain. Yet, God used their rejection of Jesus to bring about the reconciliation of the world. By their rejection, Jesus shed his innocent blood to cover over all the offenses and all the crimes and all the breaking all people had done against God's Word and his commands. Whereas our sin made us actively hostile to God, Jesus' rejection and sacrifice reconciled us to God, made peace between us and God by taking on the penalty and punishment that our sins deserved.

Since the Jews rejected Jesus and the reconciliation he brought to the world, that message and mercy from God moved on. That pattern played out in Paul's ministry. He was an apostle to the Gentiles. Yet every time he entered a new town he went first to the Jews. When they rejected him, he moved on to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. Paul explains this to his primarily Gentile audience so that they do not think more highly about themselves than they ought.

You were not selected for God's team because you were so talented that God needed you, that you were so cool that God wanted you to have you around, that you had more heart and passion than other people. God does not pick people to be a part of his team based on talents or likability or passion. So, why did God pick me at all since I'm not his first choice or one of the most talented people or one of the most likable people or because I have attributes that he needs, talents that other people don't have?

God chose you to be with him on his team out of mercy. Mercy is different from pity. This is not a pity selection as if God felt bad enough for you for not being the top draft tier that he ultimately picked you so as to raise your self-esteem. No, every person, including us, has tried to exercise free agent status, tried to play by our own rules on our own team on our own terms avoiding belonging to God's team. We all were disobedient.

God knows that we are all disobedient. He also knows that he doesn't need us on his team in order to win in his battle against Satan and all evil. Instead of casting us all aside and making it clear that he doesn't need us to be on his team, that we would just hold him back, he treated us with mercy. He treated us not as our disobedience deserved. He picked us to belong to him not because of anything special in and of ourselves. He picked us simply because he wanted us to belong to his team. He wanted us to be on the winning side, to taste everlasting victory and glory. He doesn't want us to be losers, to be stuck on the losing team, which will surely happen if we go our own way, play our own game, and try to win on our own.

In his mercy, God's call to be on his team goes out to all people. No one is excluded. He calls Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people) alike, all to belong on his team. Just because some have exercised hostility against him and refused to join him, his call still stands. In fact, his call is irrevocable. Paul was banking on this fact. He was banking on the fact that his people, the Jews, would see the Gentiles being picked to be on God's team and would envy what the Gentiles now have. And this wasn't to rub it in their faces, but to cause them to want to be a part of this since God's call is irrevocable. "Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them." (verses 13-14) He hoped that the Jews would want this merciful selection by God so that they would be saved, and Paul knew that God's call of mercy still stood for the Jews.

In the same way, God has given us something beyond comprehension. He chose us to be on his team. He chose us to belong to him – not because we were talented or likeable or passionate. He chose us out of mercy – not treating us as our disobedience deserved. By choosing us, God has put us on the winning team. He is incapable of losing. This is an enviable possession – something that we enjoy that others want.

So, how do we let others know that God is still holding an irrevocable call out to them? How do we let people know that God picks not how we pick teams, but he picks all people of all ability levels, of all levels of passion, of all social status without even holding try-outs? How do we let people know that he does not rescind his call of mercy no matter who we are or what we have done?

Maybe – and this is something for us to really think about – maybe what we can do is examine how we speak about our status with God, to ask ourselves how we can show that God chose me not because I was worthy, not because I was so good, not because I was so privileged or likable, but purely out of his mercy, treating us not as we deserve. Maybe we can make a point of talking about our worth not so much in terms of what we do and what we accomplish as if that is our primary identity, but instead making our primary identity based on the worth that God has given me, that he has picked me to be on his winning team without threatening to cut me for underperforming or for messing up as often as I do, that God's choice of me, his call, is irrevocable.

God picked you to belong to him, to be on his team. It doesn't make any sense that he would do that, but it's what he did. That's mercy. His gifts and his call of mercy are irrevocable. Show this fact proudly that God choose you out of his mercy so that you can share that God wants everyone else on his team as well, no matter who they are or what they've done because his call stands for them as well. Amen.