



Romans 11

## Grafted Olives

*God's Choice: Gentile and Jew United in Jesus*

### Introduction

This is the third in the trilogy of chapters in which Paul explains why so few of his brothers, his own race, the people of Israel, come to Jesus, their promised Messiah. (Romans 9:3,4). He has “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” (Romans 9:2) because he longs to see his fellow Jews saved.

In chapter 9 he explained that it is because God's salvation in Jesus does not come through national, ethnic or family connections, or through man's choice, but by God's grace: God graciously chooses who he will save. Paul quoted God's words to Moses, “*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion,*” and explained “*So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*” (Romans 9:15,16)

Then in chapter 10 he tells us that for Jew and Gentile alike there is only one way for God's chosen people to be saved; that is, by faith in Jesus. “*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” (Romans 10:12,13)

(If you are confused by the word “Gentile” don't be. It is the name for everyone who is not a Jew. Paul sometimes uses the name “Greek” in the same way, as in that verse.)

Now, in chapter 11, Paul reveals that it is still God's plan to save Jewish people. The result will be one church – one olive tree, he calls it here – in which Gentile and Jew are united in the righteousness God gives by his choice through Jesus.

There are five key points arising from the chapter:

### **1. God is saving Jews through the Gospel**

**(verses 1-7)**

#### **Verse 1: Jews *are* being saved!**

God has not completely rejected the Jews. Paul himself is evidence of that. Look at verse 1: “*I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.*” (Romans 11:1) Paul is a Jew. Paul is a Jew saved by faith in Jesus. Jews are being saved!

#### **Verses 2-7: A “remnant” is being saved.**

But as Paul could see too well, although Jews were being saved, not many were being saved. Most were rejecting Jesus, turning away from their Messiah. Paul recalls other times in Israel's

history when God's people, turned against God. In the days of Elijah, for example, Elijah thought he was the only faithful Jew left, but God showed Elijah that he had saved a remnant, a tiny portion of national Israel – just seven thousand in Elijah's day who had not turned to idols. (Romans 11:4) So Paul is able to say in verse 5, *"So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."* (Romans 11:5) Paul explains in verse 7 that this remnant – a remnant that includes Paul – has become "God's children ... chosen by grace," his true Israel by election. But ...

## **2. God has hardened Jewish hearts to the Gospel**

**(verses 8-10)**

Listen to verses 8-10 as Paul quotes from Deuteronomy, from Isaiah and from the Psalms: *"As it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.'"* (Romans 11:8-10)

God hardens people's hearts. In particular, God has hardened the hearts of his Jewish people. Here, Paul quotes from across the Old Testament to prove it. This can come as a surprise to people who have shaped God in their own image, but it is no surprise to people whose understanding of God has been shaped by the whole Bible.

Paul first wrote about God hardening hearts back in chapter 1 when he explained that God gave men over to their sinful desires when they consistently rejected him (Romans 1:24). God does not force anyone to sin against their will. They sin because they want to – *you* sin because you want to! But there comes a time when God gives people who will not turn to him over to their persistent sinful choice to reject Jesus.

Don't let that be you. There could well be some of you here this morning who are rejecting Jesus as Lord even though you clearly know his claims on your life and his offer of grace. You face the real danger that God will give you over to your wickedness in rejecting Jesus. Just as you have heard before, *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts,"* but *"believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."* (Hebrews 3:15; 4:7 & Acts 16:31)

Do you remember the example of Pharaoh that Paul gave us in Chapter 9? Before Moses went to Pharaoh with God's call to repentance and obedience, God had said that he had brought Pharaoh to power to show God's power even in the evil choices that Pharaoh would make.

Did God force Pharaoh to sin? Absolutely not. God came to Pharaoh through Moses' ministry time and time again ... ten times in fact ... pleading with Pharaoh to submit. Every time Moses came to Pharaoh with God's call for submission, Pharaoh gave a resounding "No!" Every time God called on him, Pharaoh chose sin. Even on the tenth occasion, when he finally said to Israel, "Go!" he reversed his choice, exposing the true state of his heart, and chased God's people into the bottom of the ocean. There, by his choice he drowned; there by God's choice he was given over to his wickedness and to eternal hell. It is clear that Pharaoh hardened his heart against God; and it is just as clear that God, by giving Pharaoh over to his wickedness, God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Paul says here in chapter 11 that it was the same for the Jews of his day, and it looks much the same for many of the Jews of our day. They have chosen to reject their Messiah, and their Messiah rejects them. God gives them up to their sinful choice.

But this rejection by God of his Jewish people is not total, for he is still saving a remnant; it is not final, for he will save his people; and it is not without purpose, for through it God is bringing the Gentiles to faith; which is Paul's next point ...

### 3. God is grafting us Gentiles into the “True Israel”

(verses 11-24)

#### Verse 11: Jewish rejection of Jesus brings salvation to Gentiles.

In other words, God has chosen to give multitudes of Abraham’s natural descendants over to their sinful choice to reject Christ, so that God’s choice to save multitudes of us Gentiles can be put into action. We, who were not even looking for Christ let alone choosing him, are being given a place in the true, spiritual Israel by God’s choice.

**But who is this true, spiritual Israel?** God had promised that Abraham would be the forefather of many people. God promised that Abraham’s whakapapa would include a very special “offspring.” What was promised? Three things:

- a. **Firstly**, God promised Abraham **natural descendants: the nation of Israel**. (Genesis 12:2). Abraham’s natural descendants became the Old Testament Nation of Israel.

But they were not all believers. They were God’s chosen nation by nature, but they were not all God’s chosen people by faith, and they were not all saved. All natural descendants of Abraham were part of the nation of Israel, but not all natural Israelites would be or were believers, chosen by God to receive the promise of a Saviour and his salvation.

In Romans 9 Paul used the example of Esau and Jacob. (Romans 9:6-13) Both were descendants of Abraham, but Jacob was a child of faith and was a true Israelite, loved and chosen by God to be his child; Esau however was a child of the flesh, “hated” by God in the sense that he was excluded from Israel. Even though he was a descendant of Abraham, God did not love Esau in the same way he loved Jacob, and God chose not to include Esau among his chosen people, Israel.

This is why here in Romans 11, Paul is able to speak of Jews by nature being cut off from the olive tree that is the true Israel of faith.

- b. **Secondly**, God promised Abraham **spiritual descendants: believers from every nation**. God promised that Abraham’s offspring will be a multitude transcending national boundaries. Gentiles will be included in Abraham’s offspring – not because they are naturally descended from Abraham, for they aren’t – but because like Abraham they will be justified by faith. They would be the spiritual Israel of faith, not of nature.

In Genesis 15:5 he said to Abraham, *“Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them ... So shall your offspring be.”* (Genesis 15:5) Not only that, but that great multitude will be from “all the peoples on earth” (Genesis 12:3) ... that is, the Gentiles. Abraham *“believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”* (Genesis 15:6)

Some Christians naively miss this and think that the nation of Israel is identical to the church of Jesus Christ. It is not the case and never was. But what *is* the case, is that those in Israel who were like Abraham, justified by faith, are one with us in the Church of Jesus Christ. They are justified by faith in Jesus, in exactly the same way as we are. The angel told Joseph to call the newly born Son of God “Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins,” (Matthew 1:21) and that is what he is doing. Jesus saves.

So in heaven there is a new hymn of praise being sung to the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus: “Worthy are you who save Israel ...” No! It could have been of course. And it was after they crossed the Red Sea, and after David’s victories, and after their return

from Babylon. But this hymn is different: *“Worthy are you ... for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* (Revelation 5:9,10)

- c. **Thirdly**, God promised Abraham **a single descendant: Jesus, the true Israel**. Jesus receives that praise (Revelation 5:9,10) because the promises to Abraham, as Paul explains to the Galatians, are especially about Jesus: *“The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ.”* (Galatians 3:16) In other words, Jesus is the True Israel, and to be united to Jesus through faith is to be Abraham’s true descendant.

In Galatians 3 we have God’s explanation of who the true Israel is: *“‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. ... if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”* (Galatians 3:6-9; 14; 29)

So who is the true Israel? Jesus is the true Israel, and all who are Christ’s are Abraham’s heirs according to promise, Abraham’s offspring who by being united to Jesus are members of the True Israel of God.

To show how God is doing this, Paul uses a couple of illustrations.

In verse 16 he uses a familiar Old Testament illustration about the way yeast works through the whole loaf of bread to make it rise. In the Mosaic Covenant this was used as an illustration of how sin can corrupt the whole loaf – the whole nation of Israel. But here he turns the illustration on its head – in the New Covenant God will finally add to his people, the church of Jesus Christ, Jews who from way back in history he had set aside as his holy people. Their being joined to God’s people today will bring their holiness – there being set aside for God’s glory – into the church, completing it by becoming one with the whole church. With them, God’s people will be complete as God’s holy people, prepared as a beautiful “bride adorned for her husband,” (Revelation 21:2) her Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, as he says in verse 15, that will be life from the dead for the Church and for Israel.

But his main illustration in this chapter is a gardening one.

### **Verse 17: God has chosen to graft Gentiles into the true Israel**

Paul likens the True Israel to a strong olive tree. Throughout the Old Testament, God has used the image of a plant to represent the Israel he is growing for his glory. Sometimes he likens Israel to an olive tree, and sometimes to a grape-vine.

Jesus picks up on this in John 15 when he says, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener ... I am the vine; you are the branches.”* (John 15:1, 5) In saying he is the true vine, he is saying that whatever place the nation of Israel had as God’s vine, it is not the *true* vine. When Jesus says “I am the true vine,” he is saying that he is the true Israel. God’s people are united to Jesus, and through him they are nourished, kept, and become fruitful.

The wild forms of grape-vines and olive trees have strong roots and grow vigorously – but they don't produce good fruit. In contrast, the good fruiting plants don't have good roots and don't grow vigorously.

I have a couple of grape-vines at home. Right now they growing vigorously and are full of ripening fruit. So are they strong-rooted plants or good-fruit plants? How can they grow well and have lots of fruit?

The answer is that they are grafted vines. A branch from a vine that fruits well has been cut off from the original vine, and it has been grafted or joined to a strong-rooted wild plant at a point where an unfruitful branch has been cut off. The result is a strong-rooted plant that nourishes a richly fruiting vine. Exactly the same thing can be done with an olive tree.

So here in Romans 11 God says the original unbelieving Jews are branches that God has cut off from his olive tree, and in their place God is grafting on Gentiles – those who don't belong and have never sought God's salvation – to fulfil his promise to save a multitude of us in Christ.

He explains this in verses 11 and 17: *“So I ask, did they [the Jews] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles ... Some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree.”* (Romans 11:11, 17)

Why has God chosen to clothe Gentiles in his righteousness?

#### **Verse 11-16: God has chosen Gentiles for salvation to provoke the Jews to faith**

God chose to clothe Gentiles in his righteousness because he set his love on us. We, who are unlovely in our sin and “gentileness” he loves, he chooses, he redeems, and he makes beautiful in his righteousness. But there is another reason too.

We also find that in verse 11: *“Salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.”* Paul goes on to explain that he has given himself fully to his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles, *“in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.”* (Romans 11:14)

That is pretty exciting for us, isn't it? The Jews who have rejected the message of Jesus, will see, in Gentile believers like us, the righteousness and fellowship of God they sought but couldn't find in keeping the law. That will stir them up to come to Jesus by faith. It is hardly surprising that Paul exclaims, *“If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”* (Romans 11:15) Their coming to faith will mean life from the dead, and God is using Christians to bring it about. What a privilege we have! Our living faith in Jesus is the very way God plans to awaken in today's Jews a desire for Jesus, and our preaching of the gospel is the way God plans to turn that desire into faith.

#### **4. God will save all the elect of Israel**

**(verses 25-32)**

That's not just God's “plan,” a sort of scheme he hopes will come about. It is what he will do! *“I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”* (Romans 11:25-27)

As he said in verse 24, the natural branches that have been cut off will be grafted back into their own olive tree. *“God is able to graft them in again.”* (Romans 11:23) There will be a time when every Gentile for whom Christ died is saved and grafted into Jesus. But with that, “all Israel” will also be grafted into Christ. (Romans 11:25,26)

Now clearly, “all Israel” does not mean all natural descendants of Abraham, because many of them, like many Gentiles, have rejected Christ and been given over by God to their hardness of heart. “All Israel” has the same sense here as “the full number of Gentiles.” It means there is a time when all Jews for whom Christ has died will be fully grafted into Christ and united with all his people, Jew and Gentile alike. And what a marvellous thing that will be: the final complete fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham!

Yes, *“As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved [by God] ... For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”* (Romans 11:28,29) *“And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’”* (Romans 11:26,27)

God’s promise to save a multitude of Abraham’s descendants is irrevocable. God has never completely left Abraham without a remnant of spiritual, Jewish heirs. God is saving his chosen people from among the Jews. And it is not just the promise to Abraham God is remembering in his faithfulness. As we read earlier this morning from Jeremiah 3, *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ... I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”* (Jeremiah 31:31-34) God is remembering, and putting into effect, this New Covenant in which Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God through the sacrifice of Jesus.

It follows that the Church of Christ must have a special focus on bringing the Gospel to Jewish people. It is good – it is necessary – that we go *“and make disciples of every nation.”* (Matthew 28:19). But is also good and necessary to take the Gospel to the Jews as Paul said at the beginning of his letter to the Romans: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16)

## **5. God’s choosing is all about God’s grace**

### **a. God’s grace saves sinners**

With so much detail about God’s grace in choosing who he saves, it is easy to overlook what this chapter makes plain: God saves sinners! God doesn’t just offer salvation, hoping someone will take up his offer. God doesn’t set up salvation as an option, waiting for dead sinners to come alive, believe, and so become his “chosen people.” They can’t be God’s chosen people if God doesn’t choose but has to wait for men to choose. God chose Israel to be his nation, and in the same way he chooses who will be his “chosen people.”

In Elijah’s day, it wasn’t that seven thousand kept themselves faithful. No! God said he had “kept for himself” these seven thousand. (Romans 11:4) He chose them to be faithful. We Gentiles didn’t come looking for salvation. No! God took us and grafted us into his chosen people. Just as we were at one time disobedient to God we have now received mercy. (Romans 11:30) He chose us.

So too, the Jews who have rejected Christ are going to be saved by God’s choice, not theirs. (Romans 11:26). Even as Paul writes, *“There is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by*

*grace, it is no longer on the basis of works [their obedience to the law or their choosing]; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” (Romans 11:5,6)*

Paul says to the Ephesians, *“By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works.”* (Ephesians 2:8,9) We were dead in our sins. We live, not because we chose to live, since the dead can’t choose to live. Give it a try next time you are in a graveyard: call out to the dead to live. It won’t work because the dead can’t hear, they can’t choose, and they can’t bring themselves to life.

Oh yes, to become reconciled to God, to be saved, to have our sins washed away and to become living members of the spiritual Israel, we must have faith. But the evidence of faith is exercising it. As we noted earlier, God declares, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”* (Acts 16:31) No one here should hesitate to call out to God in faith for that saving, cleansing life-giving grace found only in Jesus. As we read in Romans 10, *“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* (Romans 10:15)

But we live because the living God chooses to give us life. That’s what causes us to be aware of our sin and need of a Saviour: the dead are dead and don’t have such awareness! That’s why we call out to God: if we didn’t need him to give us life, to cleanse us, to befriend and love us, we wouldn’t need to call out to him. Paul again: *“You were dead in the trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.”* (Ephesians 2:1-5)

Being chosen by God for grace we never deserved, for righteousness we never earned, and for salvation we never owned, should humble us and not make us proud. It should cause us to have and express the most profound thankfulness. And it should give us an unshakeable assurance, for our salvation is all of God and nothing of ourselves. We are saved by Christ through faith, having nothing of ourselves to bring; and we live in Christ through faith, having nothing of ourselves to offer. (Galatians 3:1-6)

What confidence we can have therefore: God saves! Our salvation does not depend on us but on God.

### **b. God’s grace brings God glory**

At the end of Romans 8 Paul introduced these three chapters with this: *Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”* (Romans 8:28-30)

Now he closes chapter 11 with verses 33-36: *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”* (Romans 11:33-36)

### **c. God’s grace demands humility**

Paul warns us not to use our election by God arrogantly. Look back at verses 21-25 where Paul urges us not to be ignorant of the mystery of God’s choosing us in this way, *“that you may not be conceited.”* (Romans 11:25) He warns us in verse 20, *“you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither*

*will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you.*" (Romans 11:20-22)

There is a warning here to those who turn God's grace on its head and imagine they are somehow deserving of their place in God's olive tree. To those who do not stand by faith but depend in some measure on something in themselves or their situation, Paul warns that God will with severity cut them off. But for those who stand fast by faith, there is nothing but God's kindness.

When he reminded the Ephesians that their faith and salvation is the gift of God, he added that this was *"so that no one may boast."* (Ephesians 2:9) In a similar way, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"God chose what is low and despised in the world [that is, you and me!], even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'*" (1 Corinthians 128-31)

#### **d. God's grace creates unity**

There is something else in this chapter that is easily missed. Do you notice that there is only ever one olive tree mentioned? Whether it is Jew or Gentile or both, there is only one tree into which believers are grafted. There is only one tree; there is only one true Israel; there is only one Christ.

There should be no ethnic divisions in the churches of Jesus Christ. Paul puts it like this to the Galatians: *"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."* (Galatians 3:26-29) There is therefore no place for divisions on ethnic or cultural grounds in churches or between churches.

It is not just that there is no Greek or Jew in the church. There is no Māori or Pakeha, no English or American, no Asian or African – not even Australians! Culture is the expression of what we value and believe. It shapes our way of life, it controls our relationships with others, and it permeates our conversations. But in the church we are all being transformed into a new culture, the culture of Christ.

In God's providence we all have much in our heritage that we rightly value, and with which we can enrich Christ's church. But those treasures must never become divisive, either through the way we use them, or the way we respond to them. We are being transformed into a transcendent culture of even greater value. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You see, we haven't been grafted into the New Zealand Kauri or the English oak or the Australian eucalyptus; we haven't been grafted into the American sequoia or an Asian cherry or banyan or pine; nor have we been grafted into an African baobab. We have been grafted into the olive tree of the True Israel to become one with the people of God, and through Christ, one with God himself. *"Our citizenship is in heaven"* (Philippians 3:20) Paul tells the Philippians. We are not residents here, but *"strangers and pilgrims"* or *"sojourners and exiles"* (1 Peter 2:11). We are emigrating to our new heavenly heritage in Jesus, to a place prepared for us (John 14:2,3) in the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13) So our church culture is to be one anchored in our heavenly hope (Colossians 1:5) in which Jesus shapes our way of life; in which Jesus controls our relationships with others; and in which Jesus permeates our conversations.

That does not mean there is no place for specific missions to particular cultures, nations or ethnicities. The same Paul who rebuked the churches in Rome and in Galatia for separating Jew and Gentile in the church, the same Paul who rebuked his fellow apostle Peter for withholding fellowship from believers who were different from him, is the same Paul who declared: *“I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”* (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

To reach the lost who are different from us we must not change the gospel message, but we must be like Paul, willing to change our cultural trappings as we take to different cultures the unchanging message that *“There is salvation in no one else [apart from Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

This is not about creating seeker-friendly church services, for the worship of God is to be shaped by God’s word, his holiness and his glory, not by unbelief or the culture of unbelievers. But in the same way that Jesus was a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34), it is about becoming sinner-friendly Christians: Christians who, like Christ, are comfortable spending time with sinners without scaring them off with superficially religious habits or incomprehensible church-speak; yet at the same time, without joining in their ungodliness (Philippians 2:15). Christians, if the way we live for God among sinners as Jesus lived, Jesus, seen in us, will draw sinners to himself.

#### **e. God’s grace empowers faith in action**

We have been chosen in Christ to live such lives of shining light, that others *“may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:16) We have been chosen to be the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13) We have been chosen to live by faith, confident that because our salvation comes through God’s choice, we are secure; that because our justification rests in Jesus’ death, we are made righteous; and because God is faithful, despite our failures and sins, *“we are more that conquerors through him who love us.”* (Romans 8:37)

That leaves us to put our faith into action; to take up the challenge of Romans 10 to proclaim Christ, or as Paul told the Colossians: *“to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ... [it was] God [who] chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”* (Colossians 1:25-28)

There is a saying in Māori that fits here: *“Tama tu, tama ora; tama noho, tama mate.”* Woodenly translated it says, “Man standing, man living; man sitting, man dying.” But among its various applications – and it has many – is this one: “The man who stands and takes action has success; the man who sits on his bum has none.”

Christian, will you use the fact that you have been chosen in Christ to stir yourself to action, to live for Christ, to build unity in the church for Christ, and to befriend sinners for Christ, filling your conversations with him? With God’s grace, that will succeed in bringing glory to God, and with God’s grace, leading Jew and Gentile alike to Christ. Or will you abuse the fact that you have been chosen in Christ, sitting inactively in your security, while you watch your neighbours, Jew and Gentile alike, go to hell?