

The Irrevocable Gifts and Calling of God

Introduction: Have you ever said something and instantly wished you could take it back? Sometimes I learn so much about my own marriage when walking with couples through a pre-marital process. I remember several years ago after a couple had worked through conflict resolution exercises the young man made two hurtful comments and what happened next I will never forget – in a moment of clarity she turned to her fiancée and said: “Sometimes your mouth works faster than your brain, next time before you say anything hit the ‘pause’ button and rewind a bit, maybe you would say it differently next time! And our relationship would deepen with intimacy!” I learned from them a great deal.

Email is a part of our daily lives—some of us are learning to our misfortune an essential fact about how this technology works. We’re learning that emails are irrevocable once you hit the “Send” button; you can’t take them back! Emails are forever!

Michael Brown learned this lesson during Hurricane Katrina. He headed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In one of the worst days of the disaster he thought he was sending an email to his wife, but it went instead to the entire staff of FEMA, it read:

“Are you proud of me? Can I quit now? Can I go home? If you’ll look at my lovely FEMA attire you’ll really vomit. I am a fashion god.”

When the American public had an opportunity to read these random thoughts of the man supposedly masterminding the recovery from one of the worst disasters in our history—to grasp the sheer triteness and triviality of them—it wasn’t long before the president showed Brownie the door!”

So when I read Romans 11:29 the word “**irrevocable**” caught me a bit off guard.

Indwelling: Paul writes in Romans: ²⁹***for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*** Eugene Peterson translated this verse this way: ***God's gifts and God's call are under full warranty—never canceled, never rescinded!*** It is a strong word in a world of do-over, mulligans, UNDO, re-play, and nothing is forever. Irrevocable – something that cannot be taken back, or undone, or altered – this is the only time in the Bible that this word is used. It is a strong word. So final, that it comes out of our mouth with a thud. Irrevocable. Done. Final. That’s it.

The two irrevocable items today are God's **faithfulness** and God's **Mercy**.

These irrevocable topics began in Chapter 9 of Romans when Paul expressed: ²**I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.** *You can hear Paul's anguish and sorrow. And he expressed deep grief and confusion, but not anger that his own people have been unreceptive to the gospel of Christ, then he begins to struggle with this sadness that some of his own family members does not believe in Jesus.* Chapter 11 begins with God's power to preserve a faithful remnant. He articulates from the position that says: "the covenant is not dependant upon people it depends on God's grace." He uses an old formula of the ancient Greek culture of using a startling question followed by an immediate response: "Has God rejected his people," Paul responds, "By no means!" This comes out of Paul's agony of his own family or colleagues not accepting Jesus. So as the Gospel is growing beyond the Jewish family and is extended to people outside of the Jews lumped together under the word Gentiles. Non-Jewish people are now included among God's chosen people, but not to the exclusion of the Jews. If God, in sending Jesus, has caused the Jews to be unfaithful to God, (Note verses 30-31 ³⁰**Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,** ³¹**so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.**) So the conversation continues about the disobedience of Israel leading to the expansion of God's call and mission to include Gentiles. So what exactly was this disobedience? If God would so drastically alter salvation history over this one thing, then we must certainly have an **irrevocable** to consider. From Abraham to Jesus one irrevocable is that God is faithful to the promises God made with God's people. A promise is a promise- and God keeps his promises. However, the rejection of Jesus does not mean that God's grace has been withdrawn from the Jews. At the heart of this lesson Paul understands the inclusive nature of God's grace and faithfulness.

Image: Have you ever heard the word "**re-gifting?**" It's that practice of passing on a gift we've received from another person to a third party. Years ago I remember a Seinfeld show called the "Label Maker" when the Jerry's dentist Tim gives Jerry a label maker; it was the same gift Elaine gave Tim for doing some work

on her teeth. It was hilarious when Elaine unravels the discovery. One Christmas celebration with my family; my brother re-gifted a sweater he received from his in-laws (It was one he was not particularly fond of). Re-gifting is a risky practice. For if, the real owner learns about the re-gifting, feelings can be affected and friendships challenged. Our scripture today reminds us that it is impossible for us to re-gift the gifts and calling we have received from God. ²⁹***for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.***

The other irrevocable gift of God is linked to one of God's attributes, not merely God's actions. Despite disobedience and sin, God still offers God's people mercy! Here "irrevocable" comes into play – the pure translation of the word means: "without regret," something given with no do-over. Thomas Merton once said: ***"The very contradictions in my life are in some ways signs of God's mercy to me."*** Paul cannot fully explain the stumbling of his own family and how it becomes a means of the Good News being extended to the Gentiles, and vice versa. Unbelieving Jews are still God's people. Paul remains confident of their salvation and looks forward to a time when Old Testament people and New Testament people will be one in Christ. As Paul concludes this affirmation of God's faithfulness and conviction; that God does not re-gift or revoke an earlier call, Paul makes a bold statement: ²⁹***for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.***

Imitation/ In the End: So what do we make of all of this? There are not many irrevocable things that positively affect our lives, but we do know that God is faithful and merciful. The Bottom line for all of us Jew and Christian alike is that: "God does not give up on his commitments simply because they do not seem to be working out as planned. This doesn't mean that God is giving up on commitments made and promises offered. For little Hunter Alvin baptized this morning, it means that God will never take back his promises, faithfulness and mercy. What promise is made today God will keep. This is Good News, for all the times we wish to retrieve something that breaks another relationship—for God will never sever us or re-gift us; that is something to hold onto! It is not about us: It is about God! The gifts of God are irrevocable. The Calling of God is irrevocable. Thanks be to God! Let us pray: ³³***O the depth of riches and wisdom and knowledge of you O Lord! How unsearchable are your judgments and how inscrutable your ways!*** ³⁴***"For who has known your mind O Lord? Or who has been your counselor?"*** ³⁵***Or who has***

given a gift to you, to receive a gift in return?"³⁶ For from you and through you and to you are all things. To you, Lord be the glory forever. Amen.